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THE DESERT OF LOVE



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THE  
DESERT OF LOVE

*by*  
FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

*Translated from the French by*  
SAMUEL PUTNAM

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THE DESERT OF LOVE



# THE DESERT OF LOVE

## CHAPTER I

FOR years, Raymond Courrèges had cherished the hope of encountering once more a certain Maria Cross, on whom he ardently desired to be revenged. Many times he had followed a woman in the street, in the belief that it was the one for whom he was looking. Later, the flight of time had so softened his rancor that, when fate did at last bring him face to face with her, he failed to experience at first that admixture of glee and fury which such a meeting ought, by right, to have aroused in him.

It was not yet ten when he entered, that evening, a bar in the rue Duphot, and the mulatto jazz-artist was singing for the amusement of a solitary but attentive manager. In the cramped little room where, along toward midnight, many couples would be stamping about, a ventilator was now humming like a huge bottle-fly. To the astonished doorman, who observed, "We are not used to seeing Monsieur so early", Raymond had given no other answer than a wave of the hand, to indicate that he wished that hum-

ming stopped. The doorman vainly endeavored to convince him, confidentially, that "This new system absorbs the smoke without creating any draft." Courrèges had given him such a look that the fellow beat a retreat in the direction of the cloakroom; but the ventilator in the ceiling had become silent, like a bumble-bee coming to rest.

The young man, then, having shattered the immaculate alignment of napkins, and having noted from his face in the mirror that he was in one of his most abominable moods, proceeded to put to himself a question: "Oh, what's the use?" Good God, how he hated wasted evenings, and this one would be just that, and all on account of that beast of an Eddy H. . . . He had almost had to use force on the chap to get him out of his diggings and over to the restaurant. During dinner, Eddy had apologized for his lack of attention, blaming it upon a headache, and sat there all the while on the edge of his chair, full of physical impatience, and mentally preoccupied with some diversion which he had planned for that evening. Having consumed his coffee, he had fled, cheerful and sparkling-eyed, with red ears and flaring nostrils. All day long, Raymond had been engaged in fashioning for himself a charming picture of the party they would have that night; but for Eddy,

doubtless, pleasures more alluring than any mere exchange of friendly confidences were waiting.

Courrèges was amazed to discover that he was not only let down and humiliated, but positively blue. It shocked him that the merest acquaintance should have become indispensable to him. This, it appeared, was something new in his life. Incapable, up to the age of thirty, of that disinterestedness which friendship with men demands and being, moreover, very much taken up with women, he had come to form a contempt for anything that did not impress him as being an object of possession. Like a greedy child, he might have remarked: "I don't care for anything that's not good to eat." In those days, he had made use of his comrades only as onlookers or as confidantes: a friend, to him, had been a pair of ears. He loved to prove to his own satisfaction that he could dominate and direct them; he had a passion for influencing them, and flattered himself that there was a method in his demoralizations.

Raymond Courrèges might have been able to win for himself a following, like his grandfather, the surgeon, like his Jesuit grand-uncle, like his father, the doctor, had he been capable of subordinating his appetites to a career, and had not his inclinations sidetracked him always from pur-

suing any but immediate satisfactions. But now he was close on that period of life when only those who have something to say to the soul may exercise a firmly seated sway. As for Courrèges, the only thing of which he was in a position to assure his disciples was the best possible rate of pleasure. But the younger ones preferred companions of their own generation; and so, his following had diminished. In love, the game lasts long; but the little flock of those who began life with us grows steadily less each year. As for those who had survived the somber hazards of the war, whether they had subsequently been engulfed by matrimony or deformed by the exigencies of earning a livelihood, Courrèges, beholding those grizzled locks, this paunch, that pate, hated them for the reason that they were the same age as himself. He accused them of having slain their own youth, and of having betrayed it even before they gave it up.

As for himself, he prided himself on cutting something of a figure among the after-the-war young fellows; and to-night, in this empty bar, with only the strumming of a muffled mandolin for company (the flame of the melody died, was reborn, flickered vaguely), he looked long and ardently at his face in the glass, under that heavy head of

hair—that face which his thirty-fifth year still treated with some consideration. The thought came to him that old age, before attacking his body, had assailed his very life. If he took pride in hearing women ask, “Who is that big overgrown boy?” he knew that the lads of twenty, a little more perspicacious, no longer looked upon him as a member of their own ephemeral race. That fellow, Eddy, possibly, had something better to do than to sit talking about himself until daylight, amid the blare of the saxophone; but on the other hand, it was possible that at this very moment, in another bar, all he was doing was laying bare his heart to a youth born in 1904, and one who incessantly kept interrupting him with “Me, too” and “That’s the way it is with me.” . . .

Young people were coming in now, arming themselves with an embarrassed air of haughty self-sufficiency, as they caught sight of the empty floor-space to be crossed. They collected about the bartender. —And yet, Courrèges never permitted himself to suffer on another’s account, mistress or friend. He strove, by applying his method, to bring himself to perceive the disproportionate relation between Eddy H . . . ’s insignificance and the disappointment he felt at Eddy’s having left him in the lurch. He was pleased

to feel no resisting root as he set about tearing up this sprig of sentiment. He was even so bold as to fancy that, tomorrow, he would be able to show this chap the door; and he pictured the prospect of never seeing him again without the faintest tremor of emotion. It was, even, with a certain cheerfulness that he assured himself: "I'm going to make a clean sweep of him." He gave a relieved sigh, and then became conscious of an inner irritation, of which Eddy was not the cause. Ah, yes; it was that letter which he could feel in his dinner-coat pocket. . . . No use to read it over again. Dr. Courrèges always employed, with his son, a certain elliptic form of speech which it was easy to keep in the head:

*Just arrived at the Grand Hotel for the duration of the Medical Congress. At your service, mornings before nine, evenings after eleven. Your father,*

PAUL COURRÉGES.

Raymond murmured "Most likely. . . .," and then assumed, without knowing it, an air of defiance. The thing he held against this father of his was that it was not so easy to entertain a contempt for him as it was for the rest

of the family. At the age of thirty, Raymond had vainly demanded the same allotment that his married sister had received. When his parents refused, he had burned his bridges behind him. But the estate belonged to Mme. Courrèges. Raymond knew well enough that his father would have been generous, if he had been in a position to be, and that money meant nothing to him. He repeated the words "Most likely . . .," but still could not fail to make out a certain note of appeal in this dryly worded message. He was not so blind as Mme. Courrèges, who was annoyed by her husband's blunt frigidity, and who was in the habit of saying:

"What good does it do me, his being a good man, if I don't see anything of it? Just think what it would be, if he were a bad one!"

Raymond was put out by this sense of an appeal, coming from a father who was too hard to hate. No, certainly, he would not answer him; but all the same. . . . Later, when Raymond Courrèges went over in his mind the circumstances of that night, he recalled the bitterness he had experienced upon entering that little empty bar, but he forgot its causes, which were the defection of a comrade by the name of Eddy and the presence of his father in Paris. He was con-

vinced that his bitter mood, that evening, had been born of a presentiment, and that there was a connecting link between the state of his heart and the event which was approaching in his life. He always maintained, afterwards, that neither Eddy alone nor Dr. Courrèges would have been able to throw him into such a fit of anguish, insisting that he had no sooner sat down in front of a cocktail than his mind and body had instinctively sensed the approach of one who, at that very minute, in a taxi which had already reached the corner of the rue Duphot, was fumbling through her vanity-case and remarking to her escort:

"What a bore, I've forgotten my rouge."

And the man replied:

"There must be some in the washroom."

"Horrors! and catch. . . ."

"Gladys will lend you hers."

\* \* \*

The woman entered, *the* woman. A turban concealed the upper part of her face, leaving visible only the chin, where time is accustomed to inscribe women's ages. That glimpse of face showed forty, here and there, with drawn

skin and baited curl. The body underneath those furs must have been a squat one. Blind as though she had just come out of a tunnel, the woman paused on the threshold of the brilliantly lighted room. As her escort, who had been detained by a dispute with the chauffeur, joined her, Courrèges, without at first recognizing the man, reflected: "I've seen that head somewhere; it's a Bordeaux type." And suddenly, a name sprang to his lips, as he observed that fifty-year-old face, which seemed to be expanding with the satisfaction of being: Victor Larousselle. . . . With beating heart, Raymond once more scrutinized the woman, who, noticing that she was the only one in the room with a hat, quickly removed her turban and, turning to face the mirror, shook out her freshly clipped locks. Two big, placid eyes were first visible, then a wide forehead, formally set off by seven youthful knots of dark hair. In the upper part of the face was concentrated all that the woman had to hide in the way of surviving youth. Raymond recognized her, in spite of her bobbed hair, her stodgy body, and that insidious disintegration which began with the neck and mounted upward to the mouth and cheeks. He recognized her as he would have recognized a childhood road, even though the oaks that shadowed it might have been cut

down. Courrèges reckoned her age, and in two seconds had it: "She's forty; I was eighteen, and she twenty-seven." Like all those who are inclined to confuse well-being and youth, he possessed a deaf but ever-waking consciousness of days gone by; his eyes never ceased to measure the gulf of his dead years; each being who had played a part in his destiny he would at once range in the proper place and, sighting the face, would remember the date that went with it.

"Will she recognize me?" But would she have turned away so rudely, if she had not recognized him? When her escort came back, she must have begged him not to stay there, for he replied, in a very loud voice and the tone of a man who is playing to the gallery: "But it's not boring; in a quarter of an hour it will be jammed." He pushed up a table not far from the one on which Raymond was leaning, and sat down heavily. In addition to all the usual symptoms of sclerosis, a boundless satisfaction rested upon that bloodshot face. But as the woman remained standing, motionless, he said to her: "Come, come, what are you waiting for?" No more self-satisfaction, suddenly, in those eyes nor upon those thick and almost livid lips. Fancying that he was speaking in a low voice, he added: "It's enough,

of course, that I'm having a good time here for you to get contrary about it." She must have said to him: "Be careful; people are listening," for he practically shouted: "I guess I know how to take care of myself! And supposing they do hear us!"

The woman, who was seated not far from Raymond, grew calm again. The young man would have had to lean forward in order to have a good look at her, and he felt sure that she would evade his glance. Aware of this security on her part, Courrèges of a sudden was terror-struck, as he perceived that this occasion, one that he had been seeking for seventeen years, was in a fair way to being lost. After seventeen years, he still thought of carrying out his vow, his vow to humiliate this woman who had humiliated him, and to show her what sort of man he was—not one of those who would stand for any female's throwing them down. For years, he had found a pleasure in picturing the circumstances which should bring them together, and in imagining what ruses he would then employ in subjugating and bringing to the point of tears this woman in whose presence he formerly had cut so sorry a figure. . . . It goes without saying that if he had recognized, this evening, in place of this woman, any other shadowy being out of his

life as an eighteen-year-old schoolboy—his boon-companion at the time or the usher of whom he stood in terror—he would not, undoubtedly, at the mere sight of them, have discovered within himself any trace of either the friendly preference or the hatred which the child that was no more once had felt. But in the case of this woman, would he not find his feeling quite as vivid as on that Thursday of the month of June, 19—, at twilight, upon a dusty suburban road that smelled of lilies, as he stood before a door the bell of which would never ring for him again? Maria! Maria Cross! Out of the bristling, shamefaced adolescent that he still was at that time, she had made a new creature, a man, the man that he would have to be forevermore. But she, Maria Cross herself, how little she had changed! The same interrogating eyes, the same forehead shot with light. Courrèges reminded himself that his boon-companion of 19— would have been, this evening, a thickset man, already bald and bearded. But the faces of certain women, even in maturity, remain suffused with childhood; it is, it may be, their enduring infancy that holds our love and saves it from the ravages of time. Here she was, the same as ever, after seventeen years filled with passions at which he could only guess—like those dark virgins whose smile no flame,

either of Reformation or of Terror, ever can alter. She was still being supported by this important individual, who was noisily manifesting his impatience over the fact that the party he was waiting for was slow in arriving.

"It's probably Gladys who has kept them waiting. I'm always on time, myself, and have no use for folks that aren't. It's a funny thing with me, but I just can't stand being kept waiting—it's something I can't control. People nowadays don't know what manners. . . ."

Maria Cross touched him on the shoulder, and again must have whispered: "People are listening," for he grumbled out that he was not saying anything that could not be heard, and that it was unbelievable that she should set herself up to teach him what was what.

Her mere presence left Courrèges defenseless, a prey to that which was no more. If he had always retained a clear consciousness of time gone by, he hated to awaken precise images of it, and dreaded nothing so much as the rousing of ghosts. But there was nothing to do this evening, by way of stemming that torrent of faces which Maria had let loose in him. He could hear the schoolroom clock striking six and the desktops being banged. It had not even rained enough to lay the dust, and the tram was not well

enough lighted for him to go on reading *Aphrodite*—a tram full of workingmen, to whose features that fatigue which comes with the end of a day of toil lent an expression of gentleness.

## CHAPTER II

BETWEEN the school where, once class was let out, he was merely a bad little boy, wandering up and down the corridors or standing with his back glued to a wall, and the family home in the suburbs, there stretched that saving interval of time, the long return-trip in the tram, where he was alone at last amid indifferent beings, who did not so much as look at him—especially in winter, when the night, its darkness barely rent at long intervals by the reflector of a street-lamp or the windows of a bar, had the effect of separating him from all the world, isolating him in the dank odor of working garments: a cigarette remained clinging to a pair of drooping lips; sleep performed its topsy-turvy miracle with grimy, wrinkled faces; a newspaper slipped from a pair of heavy hands; a bareheaded woman raised her supplement toward the lamp, and her lips moved as in the act of prayer. And then, at last, shortly after the Talence church, he had to get off.

The tram, a moving blue-fire, illuminated for an instant

the yews and naked yoke-elms of an estate; and then, the lad could hear the hubbub of wheels and trolley dying away along the puddle-filled road with its smell of rotting wood which came from the leaves. He then took the little path which ran along the Courrèges' garden, and gave a shove to the half-opened servants' gate; the diningroom-lamp lighted up the cluster of foliage against the house where, in the springtime, shade-loving fuchsias were planted. Raymond's face already had taken on the hard lines that it wore at school, his brows drawn together until they formed only a single bushy line above his eyes, the right corner of his mouth drooping a little. He entered the livingroom and tossed a collective good-evening to the persons gathered within the circle of a parsimonious lamp. His mother asked him how many times she had to tell him to scrape his feet on the mat, and if he expected to come to the table "with those hands." Old Lady Courrèges, the grandmother, dropped her voice and remarked to her daughter-in-law: "You know what Paul says, that we mustn't pester the child unnecessarily." And so it was, no sooner did he put in an appearance than the conversation at once took on a harsher tone.

He sat down in the shadows. Bent over her embroidery,

Madeline Basque, his sister, had not so much as raised her head when Raymond came in. She is more interested in the dog, his thought ran, than she is in me. Raymond was "a touchy subject in our family"; she was fond of observing that "a fine specimen he'll turn out to be"; while her husband, Gaston Basque, would add: "especially with so weak-willed a father."

She of the embroidery lifted her head, and remained for a moment listening intently. "There's Gaston," and she laid down her work. "I don't hear anything," replied Madame Courrèges. "Yes, yes, he's coming"; and although no sound was audible to any other ear than her own, Madeleine arose, ran out upon the stoop and disappeared into the garden, being led by an unfailing instinct; it was as if she belonged to a different species from other animals, one in which the male and not the female possessed a quality of odorous attraction for his mate in the darkness. The Courrèges were soon able to hear a man's voice, followed by Madeleine's complacent and submissive laugh; they knew that the couple would not come through the livingroom, but would go straight on up, by way of a private entry, to the sleeping-rooms on the floor above, and that they would not be down until the second bell.

Gathered about the table, under the hanging-lamp, were Grandmother Courrèges, her daughter-in-law, Lucie, the young couple, and four little girls, all rather sandy like Gaston Basque: the same frocks, the same hair, the same freckles, there they were, huddled together like trained birds on a stick.

"And don't let any one speak to them," were Lieutenant Basque's orders. "If any one speaks to them, they are the ones who will be punished; so, everybody take warning."

The doctor's place always remained empty for a long time, even if he happened to be at home; he would come in, in the middle of the meal, with a bundle of scientific magazines. His wife would ask him if he had not heard the bell, declaring that, with meals being served at all hours, she did not see how she was ever going to be able to keep a servant. The doctor would shake his head, as though chasing off a fly, and open a magazine. This was not affectation but a matter of time-saving on the part of an overworked man, whose mind was beset with many cares, and who knew what a minute was worth. At the other end of the table, the Basques sat in isolation, indifferent to anything that did not concern themselves or their young ones, Gaston relating in a lowered tone the

steps he was taking in order not to have to leave Bordeaux: the colonel had written to the Ministry. . . . His wife listened, without losing sight of the children out of a corner of her eye, and without interrupting her efforts to educate them: "Don't mop up your plate.—Don't you know how to use your knife?—Don't sprawl out like that.—Hands on the table—hands, not elbows.—That's all the bread you're going to get, I'm warning you.—There, you've had quite enough to drink. . . ."

The Basques formed a small island of suspicious secrecy. "They never tell me anything." All the grudges which Madame Courrèges cherished against her daughter were summed up in that "They never tell me anything." She suspected Madeleine of being pregnant, kept a watch over her daughter's figure, and put her own interpretation upon the latter's illnesses. The servants always knew before she did. She was convinced that Gaston carried life-insurance, but how much? She did not even know just how much they had come into on the death of Old Man Basque.

In the parlor, after dinner, Raymond made no reply when his mother grumbled: "Well, have you no lessons to do, no compositions to write?" He picked up one of the little girls and seemed to be kneading her with his strong hands; he

lifted her straight above his head until she touched the ceiling, making a windlass of the flexible little body, while Madeleine Basque, bristling like a worried hen but disarmed by the little one's rapture, exclaimed: "Watch out there! You'll cripple her. . . . He's so rough. . . ." Grandmother Courrèges then laid down her knitting and raised her spectacles, a smile creasing her face as she, with some warmth, brought forward this bit of evidence in Raymond's favor:

"Just see how fond he is of children; you can't deny him that. Children are the only ones he does care for. . . ." And the old woman would go on to maintain that he could not have cared for them, if he did not have a good heart. "You only have to see him with his nieces to feel certain that he's not a bad sort."

Did he care for children? He found in youthfulness, indifference and vivacity a certain defense against those whom he was in the habit of calling corpses. Raymond tossed the small body upon the sofa, made for the door, and ran with long strides down the leaf-filled lanes; a patch of light in the sky, from between the naked boughs, guided his steps. On the first floor, behind a window-pane, Dr. Courrèges' lamp could be seen burning. Was Ray-

mond, this evening, going to bed once more without kissing his father good-night? Ah! it was enough, those three-quarters-of-an-hour of hostile silence in the morning; for as soon as it was light, the doctor's brougham would carry off father and son. Raymond would get out at the Saint-Genès stile and, by way of the boulevards, would make for his school, while the doctor kept on to the hospital. For three-quarters-of-an-hour, they would sit there, side by side, in that buggy which smelled of old leather, between two dripping panes. The diagnostician, who, a few moments later, would be speaking at length and with authority to attendants and to his students, had been vainly seeking for months the word which would strike home to this being which had come out of himself. How open up a path to this heart that bristled with defenses? When he flattered himself that he had found a way, and when he addressed to Raymond words which he had been thinking over for a long time, he was no longer able to recognize those words as his own, and his very voice would betray him—dry and sneering, in spite of himself. This was his constant martyrdom, never to be able to express his real feelings.

If Dr. Courrèges was noted for his goodness of heart, it was only because his deeds bore witness to it; they alone

testified to that essential kindliness which was deeply implanted within him, like a being buried alive. Impossible to get him to accept; without grumbling or a shrug of the shoulders, a single word of gratitude. As he jogged along beside his son on these rainy mornings, how many times did he turn to interrogate that face which shunned his questioning! The diagnostician in him could not resist reading his own meaning into what he saw upon that fallen angel's countenance—that deceptive gentleness of eyes too darkly circled. "The poor boy thinks I'm his enemy," the father reflected; "it's my fault and not his." He was reckoning without that instinct of adolescents which enables them to know who cares for them. Raymond understood the appeal that was being sent out to him, and did not make the mistake of classing his father with the rest; but he chose to turn a deaf ear. Moreover, he himself would have been at a loss as to what to say to this frightened father of his; for he did frighten his father, and that, too, was one of the things that turned him to ice.

And yet, there were times when the doctor could not avoid giving him a reproof; but it was always done as gently as possible, the older man forcing himself to treat Raymond as a comrade.

"The superintendent has been writing to me again about you. That poor old Abbé Farge, you'll be the death of him yet! Everything, it seems, goes to show that you are the one who has been circulating that treatise on obstetrics about the schoolroom . . . you must have swiped it out of my library. . . . The Abbé Farge's indignation, I must say, impresses me as being a bit overdone; you're old enough to know life; and after all, it is better to get your information from serious works. . . . I have written the superintendent to that effect. . . . But they have also found, in the schoolroom paper-rack, a copy of *La Gaudriole*, and naturally, you are the one they suspect; all the sins of Israel are piled on your shoulders. . . . Better watch out, my boy, or they'll end up by showing you the door within six weeks of examinations. . . ."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because, since this is my second try at it, I have all kinds of chances not to be flunked this time. I know them! If you think for a minute that they're going to do themselves out of a single chap who has a chance of passing! I'd have you know that if they were to give me the gate, the Jesuits would snap me up. They would rather have me

go on contaminating the others, as they say, than lose a single bachelor for their records. You know what a triumphant mug old Farge has, on the day the prizes are announced: thirty candidates sent up, twenty-three passed and two qualified! A thunder of applause! . . . What swine!”

“But, my boy——”

The doctor hesitated over that “my boy.” The moment possibly had come to effect a surreptitious entrance into this heart that was barred against him. For a long time, his son had declined to countenance anything that appeared in the least to savor of unconstraint; but this last cynical speech of his had been shot with a gleam of trust. What words was he to make use of, words that would not rub the lad the wrong way, in order to persuade the latter that there was such a thing as human beings who were neither crafty nor calculating, that the cleverest of these were sometimes the Machiavellis of a sublime cause, and that it was in wishing us well that they wounded us. . . . As the doctor fumbled for the best means of expressing his thought, the suburban road became a dimly lighted morning street, blocked with milk-wagons. A few minutes now, and they would be at the toll-house, that

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Croix de Saint-Genès which once had been an object of adoration on the part of pilgrims to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, but which was now no more than a leaning-post for omnibus-conductors. Not finding the right words, he took that warm young hand in his own, repeating in a low voice "My boy". . . . And then, he saw that Raymond, his head against the window, was asleep or pretending to be asleep. The youth had closed his eyes, for the reason that they might have betrayed, in spite of himself, a certain weakness, the desire to yield. That face was now a tight-shut, bony one, as though carved out of flint, with no trace of sensitivity beyond the two-fold scar formed by the eye-lashes. . . . Imperceptibly, the lad had withdrawn his hand.



Was it before or after the scene in the carriage that this woman had entered his life, the woman over there on that bench, separated from him by but a single table, and by whom he could make himself heard without raising his voice? She seemed to be perfectly calm now, and was consuming her drink without any further dread of Ray-

mond's recognizing her. For a moment at a time she would turn her eyes toward him, but would hastily avert them. Her voice, which he well knew, suddenly rose above the tumult: "There's Gladys." A couple that had just come in took the places between her and her escort, and all began talking at once:

"We hadn't finished checking our things."

"We're always the first ones here."

"Well, here you are, anyway; that's the main thing."

No, it must have been more than a year before that scene between father and son in the carriage that Old Lady Courrèges, one evening at table (it must have been at the end of spring, for the diningroom-lamp was not lighted), had remarked to her daughter-in-law:

"Lucie, I know whom those white hangings are for that you saw at the church."

Raymond had taken this to be merely the start of one of those endless conversations, the meaningless phrases of which would die away in the neighborhood of the doctor's seat. These were, most often, household discussions, each woman sticking up for her own servants, a wretched Iliad, in the course of which quarrels that had been brought in from the kitchen would let loose against one another, upon

this diningroom Olympus, the rival and protecting goddesses. Often, also, the two households would engage in a dispute over a work-woman who came in by the day. "I've spoken for Travailote for next week," Madame Courrèges would inform Madeleine Basque, and the younger woman would protest that there were all the children's clothes to be mended.

"You're always the one to get Travailote."

"Oh, well, have broken-nosed Maria come in."

"Broken-nosed Maria is much slower, and what's more, she makes me pay her carfare."

But on the evening in question, that remark about the white hangings in the church had given rise to a graver falling-out. Grandmother Courrèges had added:

"They're for Maria Cross' little boy; he's dead of meningitis. It seems that she's asked for a first-class funeral."

"What a lack of taste!"

At this exclamation from his wife, the doctor, who was reading a magazine with his soup, had raised his eyes. His wife at once dropped hers, as she always did; but her voice took on a wrathful tone, as she remarked that it was too bad the curate had not been able to bring that woman to a sense of shame, when the whole town knew very

well, and could see for itself, that she was nothing but a kept woman and an impudent hussy, with her horses, carriages and all that went with it. The doctor raised his hand:

"Let us not be passing judgment. She has not done anything to us."

"And what about the scandal? I suppose that doesn't count for anything?"

From a certain grimace the doctor made, she knew that he was inwardly marveling at how vulgar she was; and so, she forced herself to lower her voice; but it was only a few moments until she was again exclaiming that such a woman horrified her. . . . To think that the estate where her old friend, Madame Bouffard, Victor Larousselle's mother-in-law, had lived for so long should now be occupied by a wench. . . . Every time she passed the gate, it cut her to the quick. . . .

The doctor, in a calm, almost inaudible tone, interrupted her to state that in that house this evening there was only a mother at the side of her dead child. And then, Madame Courrèges, solemnly and with raised forefinger, declared:

"The hand of God!"

The children could hear the doctor's chair being pushed back abruptly from the table. He crammed the magazines into his pocket, and without another word, made for the door with a stride which he did his best to slacken; and the listening family could hear him mounting the stairs four at a time.

"What did I say that was out of the way?"

Madame Courrèges' glance put the question to her mother-in-law, to the young couple, the children, the servant. No sound was to be heard except that made by the knives and forks, and Madeleine's voice: "Don't bite into your bread. . . . Leave that bone. . . ." Madame Courrèges, having searched her mother-in-law's face, spoke again:

"It's his disease."

But the old lady, her eyes on her plate, did not appear to have heard; whereupon, Raymond burst out laughing.

"Go outdoors to do your laughing, and don't come back until you're through."

Raymond had thrown down his napkin. What an air of peace there was in the garden! Yes, it must have been at the end of spring, for he could remember the hum of beetles on the wing, and the fact that they had had straw-

berries for dessert. He sat down in the middle of the meadow, upon the warm stone of a basin where no one had ever seen a spray of water. His father's shadow, on the first floor, was wandering from one window to another. On the heavy, dust-laden twilight of a Bordeaux countryside came the tolling of a bell, tolling because a child was dead, the child of that same woman who, this very minute, had just emptied her glass, and who was seated so near to Raymond that he could have touched her by stretching out his hand. Having drunk her champagne, Maria Cross gave the young man a bolder glance, as though she no longer dreaded being recognized. It meant very little to say that she had not grown older; in spite of her short hair and the fact that there was nothing about her which was not in the fashion of this present winter, her whole body still shaped itself to the modes of 19—. She was young, but with a youth that had bloomed and become a fixture all of fifteen years ago—a youth of an outmoded sort. Her lashes could not have appeared any more worn than in the days when she had told Raymond: "We have eyes that understand each other."

Raymond recalled that, on the next day after that eve-

ning when his father had left the table, he had sipped his early-morning chocolate in the diningroom and shivered a little in the mist which came in through the open windows to mingle with an odor of freshly ground coffee. The gravel of the carriage-path had crackled under the wheels of the old brougham; the doctor was late that morning. Madame Courrèges, clad in a plum-colored dressing-gown, her hair drawn back in plaits as was her nightly custom, had given her son a kiss upon the forehead, but the school-boy had not interrupted his breakfast to receive it.

“Your father’s not down yet?”

She added that she had some letters to give him to mail; but Raymond guessed the reason for her presence at this hour. From living squeezed close up against one another, the members of the same family have, at once, a distaste for indulging in confidences and a taste for surprising, each one, the secrets of the other. The mother was in the habit of saying of her daughter-in-law: “She never tells me anything; but that doesn’t mean that I don’t know her like a book.” It was each one’s illusion that he knew all the others like a book, while he alone remained undecipherable. Raymond was sure he knew why his mother was there. “She wants to get in good again.” After a scene like that

of the evening before, she always hovered about her husband, seeking to get back into his good graces. But the poor woman inevitably discovered, too late, that her words were unerringly calculated to rumple the doctor; just as in certain nightmarish dreams, every step she made toward her husband put him further from her; it was impossible to do anything or say anything which was not hateful to him. Saddled with a clumsy tenderness, she would tiptoe forward; but with her outstretched arms, it seemed that all she could give him was bruises.

When she heard the doctor's door closing on the floor above, Madame Courrèges poured the steaming coffee into a cup, and a smile lighted up her sleepless face, furrowed with the slow rain of care-filled days that were all alike—a smile that was quickly extinguished the moment the doctor appeared; already, she was “thou”-ing him, suspiciously:

“So, you have on your top-hat and frock-coat?”

“You can see well enough that I have.”

“You are going to a wedding?”

. . . .

“To a funeral?”

“Yes.”

“Who is dead?”

"Some one you don't know, Lucie."

"Tell me, anyway."

"The Cross child."

"Maria Cross' son? You know her? You never told me, you never tell me anything. And yet, when we were talking at table about that hussy. . . ."

The doctor was drinking his coffee, standing. He replied in the gentlest voice that he could muster, a voice which evidenced an inner exasperation that knew no bounds, but which he had succeeded in strangling:

"After twenty-five years, you do not understand yet that I always have as little as possible to say about my patients."

No, she did not understand, but persisted in finding it a dumfounding circumstance that she should learn by the merest chance of Dr. Courrèges' having treated that woman:

"It's very pleasant for me, I must say, when folks are astonished: 'What? You didn't know?' and I am obliged to reply that you never trust me, that you never tell me anything. . . . Was it the child you were treating? What did he die of? You surely might tell me; I never repeat anything; but no matter, it's of no importance in the case of people like that. . . ."

The doctor, as though he had not heard, as though he did not see her, slipped into his overcoat and called out to Raymond: "Hurry up there, it struck seven sometime ago." Madame Courrèges trotted after them:

"What have I said now? All of a sudden, you get huffy."

The gate clicked, a spindletree-cluster already hid the aged brougham from view, the sun was beginning to rend the mist; and Madame Courrèges, uttering confused words to herself, turned back to the house.

In the carriage, the schoolboy observed his father with an ardent curiosity, with the desire to receive a confidence. The moment had come when they might, perhaps, have drawn near to each other. But the doctor was then in a state of mind that was far removed from this lad whom he so often had wished to win over; the prize was his now, and he did not know it, but continued muttering into his beard, as though he had been all alone: "I should have called in a surgeon. . . . You can always try trepanning." He pushed back his top-hat, lowered a window, and protruded a hairy face into the cart-jammed road. At the stile, the father murmured distractedly: "This evening," but his eyes did not follow Raymond.

### CHAPTER III

THE summer that followed was the one when Raymond Courrèges was seventeen. He recalled the season as a torrid one, without moisture, and so unbearable that the rock-ribbed city never since had known its like. And yet, he preserved a memory of those Bordeaux summers, the town protected against the north wind by a row of hills and besieged up to its very gates by pines and sand, where the heat seemed to accumulate and concentrate—Bordeaux, a city poor in trees, with the exception of that public Garden, where it seemed to young ones dying of thirst that, behind those tall and impressive gratings, the last bit of green in the world was being dried up.

But it may be that, in his memories, Courrèges confused the fire which came from the heavens that year and the interior flame which was laying him waste, himself and sixty lads of his own age, between the stiles of a courtyard separated from other courtyards by a wall of latrines. It required two overseers to keep some sort of order in this

herd of children about to die, of men about to be born. Under stress of a painful process of germination, the young human forest, within a few months, would be spreading out its branches, lank and sickly. But whereas the world and the world's customs were engaged in properly pruning almost all of these young sprouts of good family, Raymond Courrèges, for his part, was shamelessly expending all the fire that was in him. He evoked fear and horror in his masters, who, in so far as possible, took pains to segregate from the other children this lad with the hacked face (to be explained by the fact that his young flesh was ill adapted to the razor). In the eyes of the good scholars, he was the unclean sort, of whom the story was told that he was in the habit of hiding women's photographs in his pocket-book and of reading *Aphrodite* in chapel, between prayer-book-covers. "He had lost the faith." This expression terrified the school; it was as though, in an insane asylum, the rumor had got about that the maddest of the inmates had broken his straitjacket and was wandering wholly nude through the gardens. It was known to be a fact that, on those rare Sundays on which he succeeded in escaping from detention, Raymond Courrèges was accustomed to cast off his uniform and schoolboy's cap, adorned

with the Virgin's anagram, and to put on in their stead an overcoat which he had bought ready-made at Thierry and Sigrand's and a ridiculous jockey-cap such as a policeman off duty might wear, and that, in this get-up, he would make the rounds of the more suspicious booths at the fair; he had been seen in the "riding-parlor" with an ageless strumpet pressed close up against him.

When the day came for the official distribution of prizes, and, at a gathering stupefied with the heat, under leaves that were already baked brown, he listened to the announcement that a pupil by the name of Courrèges had been definitely passed with the grade of "fair," he alone knew the reason which lay behind the sustained effort he had made, in spite of the seeming disorder of his life, not to flunk out in his examinations. A fixed idea had laid hold of him, diverting his mind from all thoughts of persecution and causing the recess-hours against the plastered wall of the school-close to seem short: the idea of going away, of flight into a summer dawn, along the great Spanish highway which ran past the Courrèges estate—a road weighted down, as it seemed, with enormous paving-stones, a souvenir of the Emperor, of his cannons and his convoys. An anticipatory drunkenness, which enabled him

to taste the full flavor of every footstep that took him a little further away from school and from that dreary family of his! It had been understood that, if Raymond passed, his father and grandmother were each to give him a hundred francs; and since he already had eight hundred, he thus would come into possession of that thousand-franc note, thanks to which, he deluded himself, he would be able to see the world and to unfurl between himself and his people a limitless path. That is why it was that, without being disturbed by the others' playground sport, he would go on working during his periods of punishment. Occasionally, he would close his book and come back greedily to his dreams: cicadas were singing in the pine-trees along the roads to be; the inn was cool and shade-filled, where he wearily sat down to take his rest in a village that bore no name; the moonlight awoke the cocks, and the lad set out once more, the taste of bread in his mouth; and sometimes, he would sleep under a mill, a straw would hide from him a star, and dawn's damp hand would come to awaken him. . . .

Still, he had not fled, this youngster whom masters and parents agreed in looking upon as capable of anything; his enemies, without knowing it, had proved the stronger, for

a youth's defeat comes from the fact that he permits himself to be persuaded of his own misery. At seventeen, the most sullen of lads is good-willed enough to accept that picture of himself which others force upon him. Raymond Courrèges was good-looking, and yet had not the slightest doubt that he was a monster of ugliness and uncleanness; he failed to note the unspoiled lines of his face, and was certain that there was nothing in him capable of exciting in another any other feeling than one of disgust. He had a horror of himself, and was sure that he would never be able to pay back to the world that enmity which he aroused in it. And that is why it was that the desire to go into hiding, to conceal his face and not to have to endure the hate of strangers, proved stronger than the desire of escape. This young debauché, whose hand the children of the Sodality feared to touch, knew, as a matter of fact, no more than did they about women, and felt, for himself, that he was incapable of finding favor even with the most hopeless of slatterns. He was ashamed of his own body. In that exhibitionism which he manifested in the matter of disorderly and unclean habits, neither parents nor masters were able to see merely a youth's wretched bravado, designed to lead them to believe that his misery was self-willed—the im-

poverished pride, the despairing humility which sometimes goes with that particular age.

The vacation that followed his rhetoric-form, far from being a period of escape, proved a time of hidden cowardice. Impotent with shame, he thought he could read contempt in the eyes of the maid who did his room, and dared not meet the searching glance which the doctor, now and then, bestowed upon him. The Basques having gone to Arcachon for the month of August, there no longer were left him even the supple, plant-like bodies of children, with which he loved savagely to play.

Since the Basques' departure, Madame Courrèges was fond of saying: "It's pleasant enough, all the same, to be a little alone at last." It was in this manner that she took revenge for a remark of her daughter's: "Gaston and I need a little rest-cure of privacy." As a matter of fact, the poor woman lived in the expectation of a daily letter, and a storm never broke without her visualizing the Basques huddled together on the deck of a pinnacle in distress. Her house was no longer more than half-filled, and the empty rooms distressed her. What was she to look for from a son who was always running up and down the roads, and who

came home in a sweat and a snarling humor to hurl himself upon his food like a wild animal?

"They say to me: You have your husband. . . . Ah! yes!"

"You forget, my dear girl, how busy Paul is."

"He no longer has his classes, mother, and most of his patients are at the seaside."

"His poorer patients never go away. And then, there is his laboratory, the hospital, his articles. . . ."

The wife shook her head, bitterly; she knew well enough that the doctor never would lack for an excuse to be busy; that there would never be, until the day of his death, an interval of rest in the course of which, leisurely and unoccupied, he would be able to grant her the boon of a few uninterrupted moments. She did not believe that was possible; she did not know that love, in the fullest of lives, is always able to hollow out a place for itself, and that a harried statesman, when the hour comes for him to meet his mistress, brings the world to a stop. This ignorance kept her from suffering. She was well acquainted with the sort of love which consists in dogging a being who will not yield, a love that never comes home; but her very inability to obtain from him a single attentive glance had prevented

her from imagining that the doctor could be any different for any other woman. No, she would not have been willing to believe that there existed a woman endowed with the faculty of drawing the doctor out of that incomprehensible universe filled with statistics, observations, piles of blood-tests and samples of pus between glass slides; and she was to live for years without making the discovery that, on many evenings, the laboratory had remained deserted and patients had waited in vain for the one who might have given them relief, while the latter, of his own choice, was sitting motionless in a dark, overstuffed parlor, his face turned toward a reclining woman.

In order to arrange, in the course of his laborious days, for such interludes of privacy, the doctor had had to redouble his exertions; he did all he could to clear away his daily obstructed path, in order to attain, at the end, that period of thoughtfulness and amorous silence, in which a lingering glance gave him the thing he desired. Occasionally, when the appointed hour was near at hand, he would receive a message from Maria Cross: she was not free; the man on whom she was dependent had planned a party in a suburban restaurant; and the doctor would not have had the strength to go on living if, at the end of the

letter, Maria Cross had not set another day. By an instantaneous miracle, his whole existence was at once reorganized, with this new appointment for center; and although his time was taken hour by hour, he still, out of a corner of his eye, like a clever chess-player, was able to foresee all the possible combinations, and just what move he must make in order that, at the minute named, he might be sitting there, motionless and at ease, in that overstuffed parlor, his face turned toward that reclining woman. When the hour came for him to see her and she had not excused herself, he would rejoice, thinking: "Well, that's over; and now, I have all this happiness ahead of me." As for the days which kept him from her, he had plenty with which to fill those. His laboratory, above all, was a haven for him; he there lost consciousness of time and of love; his researches wiped out time and ate up the hours, until, of a sudden, the moment had come to push open the gate of that estate where Maria Cross dwelt, behind the Talence church.

\* \* \*

Thus inwardly consumed, he paid less attention than usual to his son that summer. The guardian of so many

shameful secrets, the doctor often would remark: "We always think that the police-news does not concern us, that murder, suicide and shameful deeds are for others, and yet. . . ." And yet, he was never to know how near his son had been, that deadly August, to going through with an irreparable act. Raymond wished to flee, but at the same time to hide himself, not to be seen. He did not dare enter a café, a shop. He would sometimes pass a door ten times without the courage to open it. This phobia rendered impossible all escape; but still, he was stifling in that house. Many evenings, death would appear to him the simplest way out, and he would open a bureau-drawer where his father kept an old-fashioned revolver; God alone willed that he should be unable to find the bullets. One afternoon, he made his way through the drowsing vineyards and down to the fish-pond at the other end of a parched meadow. He hoped the plants and mosses would so enlace his legs that he would never be able to extricate himself from that watery slime, until his mouth and eyes were so stuffed with mire that no one would ever again behold him, and he would never again see others in the act of beholding him. Mosquitoes were dancing over the surface of the water, and frogs, flopping like pebbles, disturbed

the moving shadows. Caught in the vegetation, an animal of some sort had burst open, and lay there whitening. What saved Raymond that day was not fear, but disgust.

Fortunately, he was not often alone, the Courrèges' tennis-court being an attraction for the young folks of the neighborhood. Madame Courrèges held it against the Basques for having insisted that she go to the expense of laying out this court, and then having gone away when they might have been playing upon it. As it was, outsiders alone had the use of it. Racquets in their hands, white-clad youths in their noiseless tennis-slippers would put in an appearance in the livingroom at afternoon-nap-time, and after greeting the ladies and barely taking notice of Raymond, would go back out into the sunny court, which was soon re-echoing with their cries of "play" and "out" and the sound of their laughter. "They don't even take the trouble to close the door after them," was the wail of Grandmother Courrèges, whose one idea was not to let the heat in. Raymond might, possibly, have consented to play; but the presence of young girls deterred him—ah! especially the Misses Cosserouge, Marie-Thérèse, Marie-Louise and Marguerite-Marie, three dumpy blondes with so much hair that it gave them headaches, each one being compelled

to bear upon her head an enormous edifice of yellow tresses, feebly supported by combs and always threatening to come tumbling down. Raymond hated them; why did they have to keep laughing all the time? They were constantly "convulsed" and always found others "too funny for words." To tell the truth, they did not laugh any more at Raymond than they did at any one else, but it was his misfortune to believe himself the center of the risible universe. He had, moreover, a good enough reason for hating them. On the evening before the Basques went away, Raymond had not dared refuse his brother-in-law a promise, to the effect that he would take out for a run an enormous horse which the lieutenant had left in the stable. But at that period of his life, Raymond no sooner found himself seated in a saddle than he had a dizzy spell, which made of him the most ludicrous of horsemen. The Misses Cosserouge, one morning, had happened upon him in a woodland lane, clinging for dear life to the pommel of his saddle, only to be deposited a moment later upon the sand of the bridle-path; and he had never been able to face them since without a memory of their screams of laughter upon that occasion. They took a delight, whenever they met him, in recalling the circumstances of his fall; and what a

tempest the most kindly-intentioned teasing can stir up in a young heart at this, the vernal equinox of life! Raymond could not tell one of the Cossierouges from the others; in his hatred, he saw only the bulk of them, as a species of fat monster with three topknots, eternally cackling and perspiring under the motionless trees of that August afternoon, 19—.

At times, he would take the tram and, crossing the furnace-like city of Bordeaux, would make his way to the docks where, in the dead-sea water which the puddles of oil and petrol spotted with rainbow hues, human bodies could be seen splashing about, bodies wasted with want and scrofula. They would laugh and chase one another, their naked feet clapping over the flagstones, leaving there faint traces of moisture.

October came, and the crossing was over; Raymond had passed the danger-point of his life. He was destined to be saved; he found himself saved already, upon his return to school, where his new textbooks—with an odor he always had loved—afforded him, in the course of this, his first year as a philosopher, a synoptic view of all the dreams and systems of humankind. He was destined to be saved—but not by his own strength alone. The time was near

when a woman was to come—that very same one who was looking at him, this evening, through the smoke-wreaths and from amid the couples of this little bar, a woman whose wide and placid brow time had not touched.

During the winter months which he had lived through prior to that meeting, he had been the victim of a deep-seated numbness, a sort of disarming imbecility; inoffensive now, he was no longer the one who was eternally punished. After that vacation period in which he had been tortured by the two-fold obsession of flight and death, he found himself, of his own free will, able to go through with the prescribed gestures of life, and the discipline of the thing helped him to go on living; but he got all the more enjoyment out of that daily and relaxing homeward-bound trip, the trip he made each evening from one suburb to another. Having left school behind him, he reveled in the privacy of that damp little road, which sometimes held an odor of mist, and at other times breathed upon him a cold, dry breath. He was familiar, too, with all the skies, darkling or clean-swept and star-corroded, or hung with clouds lighted from within by an invisible moon. Then, there was the toll-house, where the tramcar was always stormed by a dirty, dejected but easy-going mob; after

which, the big yellow rectangle, lighted up to outdo the Titanic, would plunge into a region that was half-city, half-country, and would roll on between tragic little gardens, utterly submerged in the depths of winter and the night.

\* \* \*

At home, he no longer felt that he was the object of a perpetual prying, the others' interest having been transferred to the doctor.

"He worries me," said Madame Courrèges to her mother-in-law. "You are fortunate not to let it worry you. I envy a disposition like yours."

"Paul is a little tired; he works too hard, that's certain; but he has a good constitution, and that's what I rely upon. . . ."

The daughter-in-law shrugged her shoulders, and made no effort to catch the old woman's muttered aside: "He's not sick, but it's true enough, he's suffering."

Madame Courrèges added: "There's nothing like a doctor for not being able to take care of himself." At table, she spied upon him, as he raised toward her a face contracted with pain.

"It's Friday; why a chop?"

"You need a strengthening diet."

"What do you know about it?"

"Why don't you see Dulac? A doctor can never treat himself without assistance."

"But my dear Lucie, why will you insist upon making out that I am ill?"

"You can't see yourself; you are a fright to behold; everybody is remarking about it. Only yesterday, somebody or other was asking me, 'What's the matter with your husband?' You ought to take some cholein. . . . I'm sure, it's your liver. . . ."

"Why the liver, rather than any other organ?"

She announced, in a peremptory tone: "That's my impression." Lucie had a very distinct impression that it was his liver, and nothing could have disabused her of it; she proceeded to surround the doctor with a swarm of admonitions, more annoying than flies.

"You've already had two cups of coffee; I'm going to tell them out in the kitchen not to fill the coffee-pot again; and that's the third cigarette you've had since lunch; you needn't try to deny it, for the stubs are in the ash-tray."

"The proof that he knows he's ill," she said to her

mother-in-law one day, "is that, yesterday, I caught him in front of the glass; you know, he never gives a thought to his appearance; but there he was, looking at his face as hard as he could and running his hands over it, just as if he wanted to iron out his forehead and his temples, and he even opened his mouth and looked at his teeth."

Grandmother Courrèges, over her spectacles, observed her daughter closely, as though she feared she might be able to make out upon that distrustful countenance something more than worry: a suspicion. The old woman had sensed something unwonted in her son's evening kiss; she felt that there was more behind it than had been there of late; and it may be that she knew what that something was, as her son for a moment bent his man's head to her. She had been accustomed, ever since he was a lad, to guess at those wounds which only one being in the world, the one who had inflicted them, could heal. But as for the wife, although she, for years, had her tenderest feelings trampled upon, she still did not believe in any but physical suffering; and so it was, every time the doctor sat down opposite her and put his two hands to his pain-racked face, she would insist:

"We all think the same, that you ought to see Dulac."

"Dulac would not be able to tell me anything that I don't already know."

"Can you stethoscope yourself?"

The doctor made no answer, being attentive only to the anguish of his heart, which felt as though it were being held and squeezed by a human hand. Ah! surely, he could count its beats better than if it had been in another bosom—all breathless, as he still was, from that game which he had been permitting himself to play at Maria Cross' side. How difficult it was to introduce a word that carried a little more tenderness, or to drop an amorous hint, in the course of a conversation with a deferential woman, one who insisted upon giving her physician a sacrosanct character and clothing him with a spiritual paternity!

The doctor lived through again the incidents of his visit. He had left his carriage in the highway, in front of the Talence church, and had followed on foot a path filled with puddles. The twilight was so short that it was night before he had gone through the gate. At the end of a badly kept lane, a lamp was reddening the window-panes on the ground-floor of a low dwelling. He had not rung; no servant had preceded him through the diningroom, and he

had entered, without knocking, the livingroom where Maria Cross, reclining as usual, did not rise; she even, for a few seconds, had gone on with her reading. Then: "I am at your service, Doctor"; and she had extended him her two hands and withdrawn her feet a little in order that he might be able to sit down upon the chaise-longue: "Don't take that chair; it's broken. There's nothing but luxury and want here, you know. . . ."

It was M. Larousselle who had installed Maria Cross, in this country house, where the caller stumbled over rents in the carpet, and where the folds in the curtains concealed holes. Upon occasion, Maria Cross would remain silent; but no sooner was the doctor prepared to turn the conversation into a channel that would facilitate the confession he was bent upon making than he would catch sight, in the mirror above the chaise-longue, of a face with a straggling beard, a pair of blood-shot eyes that had been ruined by the microscope, and that forehead of his which had been already bald at the time Paul Courrèges was an interne. All the same, he would try his luck. A little hand hung down, almost touching the carpet; he had seized it in his own and murmured, "Maria. . . ." She had not withdrawn her trusting hand: "No, Doctor, I have no fever." As al-

ways, she spoke only of herself; she had added: "I have done, my friend, something of which you will approve. I have told M. Larousselle that I no longer have any use for the carriage, and that he might sell the turnout and thank Firmin. But you know how he is, a man incapable of understanding a noble impulse; he only laughed, and insisted that, for a few days' passing whim, it was not worth while 'to upset everything here'. But I'm true to my word; I never use anything any more but the tramway; even today, coming back from the cemetery. I thought you would like my doing that. I don't feel quite so unworthy of our little one who is gone; I feel less—less—kept."

The last word was barely uttered. A pair of beautiful eyes, filled with tears, were raised toward the doctor, humbly beseeching his approbation. He bestowed it at once, in a voice grave and cold, upon this woman who was incessantly appealing to him: "You, who are so big . . . you, the noblest individual I have ever known . . . whose mere existence is enough to make me believe in good. . . ." He had to protest: "I am not what you think I am, Maria; I am only a very wretched man, a prey to desire like other men. . . ."

"You would not be the saint you are," she replied, "if you did not despise yourself."

"No, no, Maria, not a saint! You don't know, you can never know. . . ."

She surveyed him with a studied admiration; but it never occurred to her to worry about him, as Lucie Courrèges did, or even to take notice of how bad he looked. The worship which this woman forced herself to pay him was her lover's despair. His desire was immured by this admiration of hers. The poor fellow persuaded himself, once he was out of Maria Cross' presence, that there existed no obstacles which a love such as his was incapable of overcoming; but the moment he met once more the young woman who so respectfully hung on his every word, he was compelled to admit the evidence and to recognize his own irremediable misfortune. Nothing in the world could alter the scheme of their relations; she was not a mistress, but a disciple; and he was no lover, but an adviser. To stretch out his arms toward that reclining body and to draw that body to his own would have been a gesture quite as demented as smashing a mirror. As yet, he had no suspicion of the fact that she always awaited with impatience the moment for him to go. She was proud of

the fact that she interested the doctor, and in her fallen life, prized very highly her relations with so eminent a man; but how he did bore her! Without surmising that his visits were in the nature of a fatigue-duty for Maria, he felt, more and more every day, that his secret was slipping from him, to such a degree that only a supreme indifference toward him could explain the fact that she failed to perceive it. Had Maria experienced but the first faint flutterings of affection, the doctor's amorous eyes would have popped out. Alas! how utterly absent a woman could be in the presence of a man whom she, otherwise, esteemed and even venerated, and in knowing whom she took a pride, but who, nevertheless, bored her—this was something of which the doctor was accorded a partial revelation, enough of a one to overwhelm him.

He had risen, cutting Maria short in the middle of a phrase.

"Ah!" she had said to him, "you never give warning when you are about to go! But the poor, unfortunate ones are waiting for you. I shouldn't like to be selfish and keep you for myself alone."

He had crossed the deserted diningroom once more, and the vestibule, and had breathed in the frosty air of the

garden. In the carriage which took him back, he thought of Lucie's waiting and waspish countenance; she was undoubtedly worried about him and on the lookout for him, and he told himself:

"The main thing is not to cause suffering; it is enough that I suffer; not to cause suffering. . . ."

\* \* \*

"You look worse than ever this evening. Why do you put off going to see Dulac? If you won't do it for your own sake, do it for ours. One would think you were the only one interested, when it's something that concerns us all."

Madame Courrèges called up the Basques to bear her out, and the latter emerged from a low-pitched conversation, dutifully to add their entreaties.

"Yes, certainly, father, we all want to keep you just as long as we possibly can."

At the very sound of that hateful voice, the doctor grew ashamed of the feelings that rose up in him against his son-in-law. "And yet, he's a good lad . . . there's no excuse for me. . . ."

But how was he to forget the reasons which he had for hating him? For years, one thing alone in his marriage had impressed the doctor as being precisely in accordance with his dreams: up against the big bed which the married pair occupied, was that little one where, each evening, his wife and he would stand looking down upon the sleeping Madeleine, their first-born. No trace of her breathing was perceptible; an innocent little foot had kicked back the covers; and between the bars of the cradle, there dangled a little hand that was soft and wonderful. She was so good a child that one might go ahead and spoil her without risk, and she was so flattered by her father's fondness for her that she would remain for hours at a time playing noiselessly in the doctor's study. "You say that she's not highly intelligent," he would argue, "but she has something better than intelligence." Later, he who had always detested going out with Madame Courrèges loved to be seen with his young daughter. "They will think you're my wife." About this time, he had selected from among his students Fred Robinson as the only one who, he felt, understood him. The doctor already was calling him son, and was waiting until Madeleine was eighteen to go through with the marriage, when, at the end of her first

winter in society, the girl had notified her father that she was engaged to Lieutenant Basque. The doctor's furious opposition to the match lasted for months, and was something which neither his own family nor society at large could understand. How could he prefer to this rich officer of good family and brilliant future an obscure student of no fortune and one who came from goodness only knew where? The self-centeredness of a man of science, they said.

The doctor's reasons had been too highly individual for him to be able to put any of them into words for the benefit of those about him. From the first objection he had raised, he perceived that he had become his cherished daughter's enemy; he was convinced that she would have rejoiced over his death, and that he was no longer anything more to her than an old wall to be knocked down in order to enable her to get at the male who was calling to her. From need of seeing clearly, and by way of measuring the hatred of one who had been his favored child, he heaped his obstinacy to overflowing. His old mother herself had been against him, and had become the young couple's accomplice. Innumerable plots were set afoot, under his own roof, to make it possible for the be-

trothed pair to meet without his knowing anything about it. When he at last yielded, his daughter had kissed him on the cheek, and he had pushed back her hair a little, as he had done in the old days, to touch his lips to her forehead. Those around him went on saying: "Madeleine adores her father; she's always been his favorite child." And no doubt to the day of his death, he would hear her calling him "my dear little dad."

Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but put up with this Basque; but despite a tremendous effort to conceal it, the doctor could not avoid betraying his antipathy. "It is astonishing," Madame Courrèges would say. "Paul has a son-in-law who thinks exactly as he does on every question; and yet, he doesn't like him." That, indeed, was the thing the doctor could not forgive in this young chap, whose mind like a deforming mirror, gave back to him a caricature of his own most cherished ideas. The lieutenant was one of those individuals whose approbation is a little more than we can stand, and who lead us to doubt those truths for which we would have shed our blood.

\* \* \*

"But father, I insist, you must take care of yourself

for your children's sake; you must let them plead your own cause against you."

The doctor left the room without replying. The Basques, later, had retreated to their bedroom (an inviolable domain, of which Madame Courrèges would say: "I never set foot there; Madeleine has given me to understand that she would not like it, and there are certain things which I don't have to be told twice; I can take a hint), and the couple were undressing in silence, when the lieutenant, who was on his knees at the side of the bed, suddenly turned and put a question to his wife:

"Is the estate part of the common property?"

....

"I mean to say, was it purchased by your parents after their marriage?"

Madeleine believed it had been, but was not sure.

"That would be interesting to know, because in case your poor dear father . . . we would be entitled to half."

He was silent again, then suddenly inquired Raymond's age, and appeared to be put out by the fact that the lad was but seventeen.

"What can that have to do with you? Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, nothing. . . ."

Possibly, he was reflecting that a minor always complicates matters in the case of an inheritance; for as he rose to his feet, he said:

"For my part, I only hope your poor dear father doesn't leave us for some years to come."

The enormous bed yawned in the shadows, waiting for the pair. They went to it just as they set themselves down at table at noon and at eight o'clock at night: at the moment when hunger came.

During these same nights, Raymond was sometimes wakeful; something warm and tasteless would be trickling over his face and running down his throat, and his hand would gropingly seek a match. Then, he would see the blood spurting from his left nostril, spotting his nightgown and the bedclothes; and he would get up and, utterly benumbed, would look at his tall, scarlet-stained body in the glass, would dry his fingers, sticky with blood, upon his breast, and find amusement in his red-smeared face, pretending that he was, at once, an assassin and the assassin's victim.

## CHAPTER IV

IT was an evening like any other evening—at the end of January, when, in that region, winter already is on the wane—that Raymond, in the tramcar filled with workmen, was astonished to perceive this woman sitting opposite him. Far from feeling any sense of injury at being, each evening, a confused part of this human cargo, he imagined that he was an emigrant; he was seated among the passengers of the between-decks, as the vessel clove the darkness; the trees were corals, and the passersby and the vehicles in the street were the mysterious population of those great deeps. A crossing was all too short, in the course of which he was sure of not being humiliated, since there was not one of these other bodies that was not fully as neglected and ill-kept as his own. And when, occasionally, his glance would meet another glance, he did not read in that other any faintest trace of derision; when all was said, his own linen was a bit cleaner than that shirt over there, badly buttoned over the chest of a hairy animal. He

felt at ease among these people; the suspicion never came to him that a word would have been enough to occasion the springing-up of that desert which separates classes as it does individuals, and that the only communion which was, doubtless, possible was that to be attained through this promiscuous contact, through this common immersion in a tramcar plowing its way through the suburban night. Raymond, who was so surly in school, here exhibited as he leaned back in his seat, only the wearily bandied head of any youth of his age, whose body sleep was engaged in undoing and in unfolding like a bouquet.

On the evening in question, he saw sitting opposite him this woman, this lady. She was seated between two men in grease-stained garments, veiled in black but with her face uncovered. Raymond was later to ask himself why it was that, under her glance, he had not at once experienced that feeling of shame which any servant-maid could give him. No, there was no shame here, no sense of torture; possibly for the reason that, in this tramcar, he had a sensation of anonymity, being unable to conceive any circumstance which might put him in touch with the fair unknown. But above all, it was because he did not make out upon the latter's face anything which in the least re-

sembled curiosity, scorn or derision. And yet, how she kept looking at him! Studiously, methodically, like a woman who had said to herself:

“That face will make up for a few wretched minutes which I must live through in a public conveyance; I will forget all the rest in that dark, angelic-looking countenance. There can be no harm in that; the mere act of looking at it will be an escape. There he is in front of me, like an unknown land; his eyelids are the wasted shores of a sea; two indistinct lakes are sleeping at the edge of his lashes. The ink on his fingers, his graying collar and cuffs, that missing button—all that is but an earthy stain upon the unblemished fruit, suddenly dropped from the bough, and which you with a cautious hand are now picking up from the ground.”

And Raymond, likewise, had a feeling of security, since he did not have to fear that this stranger would speak a single word to him, or that any bridge would be reared to unite them to each other; and so, he looked at her, with that same calm and steady gaze with which one looks at a planet. . . . (How innocent her forehead has remained! Courrèges steals a glance at it this evening, and sees it suffused with a light that does not come from the rutilant

little bar, a light which is, rather, that of an inner intelligence, one with which it is so exceedingly rare for a woman's face to be marked, but which is all the more touching when one does meet with it there, enabling us then to conceive of Thought, the Idea, Intelligence and Reason as being feminine words!)

When they came to the Talence church, the young woman arose, leaving with the lost souls behind her nothing but her fragrance; and even that perfume had spent itself before it came time for Raymond to get off. It was not very cold that January evening, and the youth did not think of running; already, the mist held a hidden taste of the gentler season that was approaching; the earth was nude, but was no longer sleeping.

\* \* \*

Raymond, wholly absorbed, did not see anything at the family table that night. And yet, his father's face never before had been so haggard; the doctor, indeed, looked so ill that Madame Courrèges was silent for once. She did not dare run the risk of "upsetting" him, she told the Basques, after her husband had gone upstairs with his mother;

but all the same, she was of a mind to go see Dulac without the doctor's knowing anything about it. The lieutenant's cigar was stinking up the room; leaning against the mantelpiece, he observed:

"There's no mistake about it, Mother; he's a sick man."

His words, curtly stammered out, had the ring of a command; and when Madeleine would have contradicted her mother, with "It may be only a spell . . ." the lieutenant interrupted her:

"But I tell you no, Madeleine; his condition is serious; your mother is right."

The young woman having ventured a further objection, he exclaimed: "But I'm telling you, your mother is right! Isn't that enough for you?"

\*   \*   \*

On the floor above, Grandmother Courrèges had knocked gently at her son's door, as the doctor sat before his open books. She did not put any question to him, but quietly went on with her knitting. If he had had his fill of silence and repression, if he felt the need to talk, she would be there, ready to listen to everything. A sure-footed in-

stinct, on the other hand, restrained her from inviting any confidence. And he did think, for a few moments, of no longer endeavoring to restrain that inner cry which was stifling him; but he would have had to go back so far; he would have had to take up the chain of his sufferings link by link, up to that evening. . . . And how explain the lack of proportion which existed between his sufferings and the circumstance which had given rise to them? For they were due to nothing more than this: At the appointed hour, the doctor had gone to Maria Cross'; a maid had informed him that Madame had not yet returned, which was anguish No. 1; and he had accepted the servant's invitation to wait in the deserted livingroom, where the ticking of a clock failed to keep time to the beating of his heart. A lamp lighted up the showy beams of the ceiling, and on a low table near the divan were all those cigarette-butts in an ash-tray. "She smokes too much . . . she's poisoning herself." How many books there were! But not one with the last pages cut. His eye took in the torn folds of the great faded silk curtains, and he repeated to himself: "Luxury and want, want and luxury. . . ." He glanced at the clock and then at his watch, and made up his mind that he would leave in a quarter of an hour; where-

upon, time at once began to plunge headlong forward. In order that it might not seem too short, the doctor forbade himself to think of his laboratory or his interrupted experiment. He had risen and, going over to the chaise-longue and casting a furtive glance in the direction of the door, had dropped to his knees and buried his face in the cushions. . . . When he arose, his left knee gave its customary snap. He took up a position in front of the mirror, ran a finger over the swollen vein in his temple, and gave vent to the reflection that any one who had come upon him at that minute would have believed him to be mad. In accordance with his working custom of reducing everything to a formula, he enunciated: "The moment we are alone, we are quite mad. Yes, the control of ourselves by ourselves is effective only so long as it is sustained by that control which others impose upon us." Alas! This process of reasoning had sufficed to exhaust the quarter-of-an-hour's grace which he had accorded himself. . . .

How explain to his mother, who was waiting for a confidence, the distress which had been his at that minute, the renunciation which had been demanded of him, the uprooting of that doubtful happiness which lay in a daily conversation with Maria Cross? Something more was called

for than the desire to confide, or the presence of a person in whom to confide, even though that person chanced to be one's mother. Who of us possesses the ability to put into a few words his whole interior world? One can tell nothing, the moment one finds it impossible to tell everything. And moreover, what was this old lady to understand of that profound music, those rending dissonances which were going on inside her son? That son, who belonged to another race, for the reason that he was of another sex. . . . Sex alone puts us farther apart than two planets. . . . As he sat with his mother, the doctor recalled his pain, but was unable to phrase it. He remembered how, tired of waiting for Maria Cross, he had picked up his hat, when footsteps had echoed in the entry-way, and his life, it seemed, had been held in suspense. The door had been opened, not by the woman for whom he was waiting, but by Victor Larousselle.

"I'm afraid you're spoiling Maria, Doctor."

No suspicion in that voice. The doctor had given the fellow a smile, as the latter stood there, faultless, confident, serge-clad and fairly bursting with complacency and self-satisfaction.

"What game for you physicians these neurasthenics, these

imaginary patients are. Eh? No, no, I'm joking; everybody knows how disinterested you are. . . . But damme, if Maria hasn't stumbled on a rare bird in you. Do you know why she's not back yet? Madame has given up her carriage; that's her latest whim. Between ourselves, I'm inclined to think she's a little cracked; but in the case of a pretty woman, that only adds to her charm, eh, what? What do you think, Doctor? You old dog, you! I'm glad to see you. Stay for dinner; Maria will be glad to have you; she's crazy about you. No? Well, at least, wait until she comes back; you're the only one I have that I can talk to about her."

"You're the only one I have that I can talk to about her. . . ." Without warning, out of the mouth of this big braggart, those torturing words. "That passion of his," the doctor told himself, in his homeward-bound brougham, "is the scandal of the town; and yet, it's the only streak of nobility in that simpleton. At the age of fifty, he discovers that he is capable of suffering on account of a woman. He has possessed her body, but that is not enough for him. His world, his business, his stables—there exists for him now, outside of that universe, a superior principle, one of suffering. . . . It may be that the old romantic conception

of the passions was not so far-fetched, after all. Maria Cross! Maria! The pain, the pain of not having seen you—but above all, what an omen in the fact that she did not even think of letting me know! I must count for very little in her life; she gives up seeing me without so much as a thought. . . . I put all infinity into a few minutes, and they are nothing, nothing at all to her. . . .”

The doctor was awakened by the sound of words; his mother was unable to stand the silence any longer. She, likewise, had been following the incline of her own private preoccupations, and was thinking no longer of her son's unrevealed hurt. She came back to her one obsession, her relations with her daughter-in-law:

“I give way in everything; I never give her any other answer than ‘Oh, well, my girl, do as you please . . . have it your way!’ I’m not contrary. Ever since Lucie gave me to understand that it was she who brought the fortune. . . . Thank God, you earn plenty. You had a future, that’s true enough, when you married her, but nothing more; and she, a Boulassier of Elbeuf! I know very well that their factories then weren’t what they are today; but all the same, she might have made a much better match. ‘Those that have, want’, as she told me one day, in speak-

ing of Madeleine. But let's not worry about that; if it weren't for the servants, everything would go along all right."

"The most dreadful thing in life, my dear mother, is to put the servants of different masters to live together under the same roof. . . ."

He brushed his mother's forehead with his lips, left the door ajar so that she might be able to see her way, and repeated mechanically to himself:

"The most dreadful thing in life. . . ."

\* \* \*

The next day, Maria Cross was still adhering to her whim of doing without her carriage; for in the tramcar, Raymond saw the unknown seated opposite him in the same place as usual. Her placid eyes once more took possession of the boyish face, traveling around the eyelids, skirting the dark hair and coming to rest on a gleam of teeth between the lips. He remembered that he had not shaved since the evening before last, ran a finger over his lean cheeks, and then shamefacedly hid his hands under his cape. The stranger lowered her eyes, and he did not at

first perceive that, from lack of garters, one of his socks had slipped down and his leg was showing. He did not have the nerve to draw it up, but changed his position, instead. Yet, this incident did not pain him. What Raymond had always hated in others had been their laughter, their smiles, even when restrained; he was adept in surprising the least quivering at the corners of a mouth, and he knew what it meant when a person bit his lower lip. . . . But that woman there was looking him over with a face that was strange to him, one that was at once intelligent and animal-like—yes, that was it; it was the face of a marvelous animal of some sort, an impassive one, one that did not know laughter. He was unaware that his father was in the habit of teasing Maria Cross about her habit of drawing a laugh down over her face like a mask, that would at once drop, without her glance's having lost anything of its accustomed imperturbable gravity.

When she had got off at the Talence-church, and he had nothing left to rest his eyes upon, save the leather of the seat, a little sunken-in, where she had sat upon it, Raymond no longer had any doubt that he would see her again the following day; he would not have been able to give any valid reason for the hope that was in him; that was his

faith, and that was all. That evening, after dinner, he lugged up to his room two jugs of boiling water and proceeded to scour out his tub; and the next day, he rose a half hour earlier than usual, for the reason that he intended to shave every day from now on.

Just as the Courrèges might have observed for hours the budding of a young chestnut, without in the least understanding anything of the mystery of efflorescence, so at this time, they failed to see the marvel that was in the midst of them. As the first turn of a spade brings to light the fragment of a perfect statue, so Maria Cross' first glance had unearthed a new being in this unkempt schoolboy. Under a woman's warming gaze, that handsome hidden body, that neglected body, became like the rude young stalks of an old, old forest where, of a sudden, a sleeping goddess stirs. The Courrèges perceived nothing of the miracle, for the reason that the members of a family are too closely bound together to be able to see one another. Raymond, for some weeks past, had been a young man very much concerned with his appearance, a convert to hydropathy, certain of his power to please and bent upon captivating; but his mother still saw in him only an untidy lad. A woman, without uttering a single word, by the

mere power of her glance, had transformed their young one, fashioning him anew, without the Courrèges' being able to recognize in his person the effects of this strange enchantment.

In the tramcar, which was not lighted, now that the days were growing longer, Raymond each time essayed a new gesture. He would cross his legs, disclosing a pair of neatly gartered socks and shoes that shone like mirrors (there was a shoeblack at the Croix de Saint-Genès); he did not have to conceal his cuffs now; he wore gloves; and one day he took off his gloves, and the young woman could not refrain from a smile at sight of those nails which, thanks to an overzealous manicure, were a bit too highly rouged; but at least, after having been gnawed away for years, they no longer attracted attention. All this was but the outward sign of an invisible resurrection; the haze which had gathered in this young soul little by little was being dispersed, as a result of this new, this grave and ever silent thoughtfulness, a habit of mind which custom was rendering daily more familiar. What if he was not a monster, after all, but, like other young fellows, capable of coaxing a woman's glance, and, who knows? something more than a glance! In spite of their silence,

time of itself wove a certain woof between them, which not a word, not a gesture could have rendered any the more durable. They felt that the hour was near when the first word would be spoken, but Raymond did nothing to hasten the coming of that moment. A timid galley-slave, it was enough for him to have lost consciousness of his chains; it was a sufficing joy, at the moment, to have become, suddenly, another being. Before this unknown woman had looked at him, had he been, really, anything more than a dirty schoolboy? We have all been fashioned, and refashioned by those who have loved us, and however yielding the hold they may have had upon us, we are still their work—a work, moreover, which they themselves fail to recognize, and which is never the one they had conceived. Not a love, not a friendship ever has crossed the path of our destiny without having collaborated with that destiny for all eternity. Raymond Courrèges this evening, in that little bar in the rue Duphot, would have been another man, if, in the year 19—, when he was in the Philosophy class, he had not beheld seated opposite him, in the homeward-bound tram, one Maria Cross.

## CHAPTER V

HIS father was the first who was brought to recognize this new man in Raymond. One Sunday at the end of that same spring, the doctor was sitting at table more absorbed than was his wont, so absorbed that he barely caught the sounds of an argument that was going on between his son and son-in-law. The subject in dispute was bull-fights, for which Raymond had a passion. The latter had left, that Sunday, immediately after the fourth bull was slain, in order to be sure of not missing the six o'clock tram. His self-denial, however, as it turned out, had availed him nothing; for just as he might have expected, the strange lady was not there. It was Sunday; he should have known . . . she had caused him to miss two bulls. . . . So ran his thoughts, as Lieutenant Basque lectured him:

"I don't understand why it is your father permits you to attend such a butchery."

It was Raymond's reply: "I think it's too funny, army-

officers being afraid of a little blood," which had let loose the hubbub. The doctor suddenly heard:

"But you're not looking at me when you say that!"

"I *am* looking at you, and all I see is a chicken-gizzard."

"A chicken-gizzard!"

They had all risen; the whole family was in an uproar. Madeleine Basque exclaimed to her husband: "Don't answer him; it's not worth while; that doesn't mean anything coming from him." The doctor begged Raymond to be seated: "Sit down, and go on with your dinner, and let's put an end to this." The lieutenant, in a loud voice, insisted that he had been accused of being a coward; Madame Courrèges asserted that Raymond had not meant to imply anything of the sort. Meanwhile, all had taken their seats again; a secret conspiracy led each one to do all he could to stamp out the blaze. Family spirit inspired in them a profound repugnance for whatever threatened their equipoise. An instinct of self-conservation had instilled into each member of this crew, embarked upon the same galley for life, an anxiety not to permit any conflagration to be kindled aboard-ship.

For this reason, silence now reigned in the room. A light rain at that moment ceased pattering on the steps

outside, and the odors which it had released were wafted over the silent family circle. Some one hastened to remark: "It will be cooler now," to which a voice replied that this shower was nothing, that it would not even lay the dust. In the meanwhile, the doctor, with some stupefaction, was observing this grown up son of his, to whom he had given no thought of late, and whom he found difficulty in recognizing. He himself, as it happened, on that same Sunday, had just emerged from a prolonged nightmare; it was one in which he had been floundering about ever since that already distant day when Maria Cross had failed to keep her appointment, and had left him for a private interview with Victor Larousselle. That Sabbath day which was drawing to a close, one of the most merciless in all his life, had left him free at last (at least, he believed it had). Salvation had come to him out of an immense fatigue, a nameless lassitude; the truth was, his sufferings, that day, had been a little more than he could bear. No desire now except that of turning his back to the fight, of digging himself into his old age. Almost two months already between that period of vain waiting in Maria Cross' "luxury and want" livingroom and this terrible afternoon, when he at last had laid down his arms.

And now, at that silent table, the doctor once more forgets his son, and begins recalling each incident of that wearing journey; he goes over it all again, step by step, in his mind.

\* \* \*

His period of unbearable suffering had begun the next day after that broken appointment, with the receipt of the following long letter of apology:

*It is partly your fault, my dear friend, Maria had said to him in that note which he had read and reread for two months past; it was you who inspired me with the idea of giving up those awful luxurious habits of which I am so ashamed. Not having my carriage any more, I was unable to be back in time to receive you at our usual hour. I get to the cemetery later now, and I am also fond of remaining there longer. You cannot imagine how calm La Chartreuse is at the close of the day, filled with birds singing on the tombs. It seems to me that my little one approves of me now, that he is satisfied with me. And then, what a compensation I find in that tram full of workmen which brings me home! You will think that I am becoming a bit*

*too ecstatic, but I am not; I am happy to be there, in the midst of those poor people of whom I am not worthy. I shall not venture to tell you just how much I love those return-trips on the tramway. "They" would go down on their knees now to get me to agree to go back to the carriage which "they" gave me, but I should not consent. My dear doctor, what difference does it make, after all, if we do not see each other any more? Your example, your counsels are enough for me; there is a bond between us beyond any human presence. As Maurice Maeterlinck has so excellently put it: "A time will come, and it is not far distant, when souls will communicate with each other without the intervention of bodies." Write to me; your letters are enough, my dear spiritual director!*

M. C.

*Should I go on taking my powders? And my injections? I have only three ampules left; should I buy another box?*

Even if she had not wounded him so cruelly in it, this letter would have been displeasing to the doctor for its smirking complacency, its false and self-satisfied humility. Knowing the sorriest secrets of men, the physician professed a boundless forbearance for their kind. One vice

alone exasperated him in fallen creatures, and that was a dexterity in embellishing their fall. It was man's last infirmity, when his own dust dazzled him like a diamond. Not that Maria Cross was accustomed to this sort of lying. She even had charmed the doctor at first with the passion she had manifested for seeing clearly within herself and embellishing nothing. She liked to dwell on the nobility manifested by her mother, who, left a widow when she was very young and being only a poor governess in a county-seat, had, Maria would say, set her daughter an admirable example. "Mamma was barely able to pay for my tuition in high-school, and she already had visions of me as a *sevrain*; but she had the joy before she died of being present at my wedding, which was something she had not hoped for. Your son-in-law, Basque, was very well acquainted with my husband, who was an adjutant in his regiment. My husband worshiped me, and did all he could to make me happy. After his death, with my little one to care for, I had hard work getting along; but I might have made out just the same; it was not want that was responsible for my downfall, but as vile a thing, perhaps, as there is the desire for a fine position in life, the certainty of making a match. . . . And now, what still keeps me

with 'him' is my cowardice when I come to think of that struggle which I should have to begin all over again, the labor, the ill-paid toil. . . ." And often, after these first confidences, the doctor had heard her inflicting humiliations upon herself, condemning herself without mercy. Why, then, this novel and despicable passion for self-praise? However, it was not this that hurt him most in the letter; that communication grieved him, for the reason that he knew he was lying to himself, and that he dared not sound out that other, deeper wound, the only one that he could not bear, and which was due to the fact that Maria did not care to see him any more, that she could look upon their separation with a certain lightness of heart. Ah! that phrase of Maeterlinck's regarding souls which communicate without the intervention of bodies—how many times was he to hear it within himself, while his patient was going into endless details concerning his symptoms, or as a terrified student up for examination was stammering out his ignorance of what a hæmoptysis was! Assuredly, he had been mad to believe that a young woman could find a perceptible pleasure in his company. Mad! Mad! But what process of reasoning is to save us from that unendurable sorrow, when the beloved being whose nearness is neces-

sary to our mere physical existence resigns herself or himself with an indifferent, perhaps even a contented heart to our enduring absence? We are nothing for the one who is our all.

The doctor was making, at this time, an effort to gain the mastery of himself. "I've found him in front of his mirror again," announced Madame Courrèges; "he's beginning to be upset." For the doctor knew that no sight was better adapted to calm him, to lead him back to the serenity of total despair, than a glimpse of his own wretchedly tired fifty-year-old face. Not to think any more of Maria, except as of one dead, to wait for death, himself, while doubling the dose of work—yes, to maul and slay himself and achieve deliverance in the opium of a frantic task. But he, who was scandalized by the fact that others lied to themselves, continued to be the prey of his own delusions. "She has need of me; I owe myself to her, as I do to every one that is sick. . . ." He wrote that he deemed it necessary to keep in touch with her, that she was certainly right in taking the tramway; but why go out every day? He begged her to let him know when she would be at

home, and he would see to it that he was free to come and call upon her at the usual time.

For a whole week he awaited an answer. Each morning, a glance at the pile of newspapers and prospectuses was enough. "She's not written yet." He resorted to calculations: "I mailed my letter Saturday; there's only one delivery Sunday; she didn't get it until Monday; and she may have waited two or three days before replying . . . it would be surprising, even, if I had an answer today. From tomorrow on, I shall begin to be worried."

One evening, returning home utterly exhausted, he found the letter waiting for him at last:

*. . . . My visit to the cemetery is a sacred obligation to me. I am resolved to make that pilgrimage in all weathers. It is at twilight that I feel the closest to our little angel. It seems to me, he knows when I am coming and is waiting for me. It is absurd, I know, but the heart has its reasons, as Pascal says. I feel happy and at peace, when at last I catch the six o'clock tram. Have you any idea what a tramcar filled with workmen is like? But I am not the least bit afraid; I am very close to the people, myself; and for all that I am separated from them out-*

*wardly, am I not the nearer to them in another way? I look at those men; they impress me as being quite as lonesome,—how would you explain it?—as uprooted, as depreciated as I am, myself. My house is more luxurious than theirs; but just the same, it is a furnished one. Nothing is mine, just as nothing is theirs. . . . Not even our bodies. . . . Why do you not come past the house very late, before going on home? I know that you do not enjoy meeting M. Larousselle; but I shall let him know that it is necessary for me to see you alone; you need only speak a few formal words to him, after the consultation. . . . You forgot to let me know about the powders and my injections.*

The doctor first tore up this letter and threw the scraps away. Then, he went down on his knees and gathered them up with an effort. Didn't she know that he could not endure being near Larousselle? There was nothing about that chap that was not hateful, to him—ah! he was the same sort as Basque . . . that lip under the dyed moustaches, those hog's cheeks, that shoulder-span, all proclaimed an unassailable self-complacency. Those big thighs under the overcoat were the very picture of a satisfaction that knew no

bounds. Because Larousselle paid Maria Cross off with the tawdriest coin there was, it was commonly said at Bordeaux that he was "keeping her for show." The doctor was almost the only one who knew that Maria was really a passion with this big-wig of the town, as she was, at the same time, his hidden defeat, and one that caused him to burst with rage. He had bought her, none the less, and he was the only one to possess her, the idiot! Having been left a widower, he might have married her, had he not had a son, the house of Larousselle's sole heir, who was being prepared for his august destiny by an army of nurses, priests and tutors. Impossible to expose a child like that to contact with such a woman, or to bequeath him a name sullied by a misalliance. "What do you expect, Father," was the protest from Basque, who was very proud of his native city and its show-points. "Those sentiments impress me as being highly commendable ones. Larousselle has good stuff in him; there is an amazing amount of style to everything he does; he's a gentleman, and that's enough for me."

But Maria, who knew the disgust which this man inspired in the doctor—how had she dared give him an appointment at the very time when she knew he could not avoid meeting the object of his execration face to face? He

ended by persuading himself that she had planned all this, in order to get rid of him. After having, for a number of weeks, written and then torn up the maddest and most savage of letters, he finally sent her a note, brief and dryly worded, in which he made it plain that, since she could not bring herself to remain at home a single afternoon, it could only mean that she was getting along marvelously well and had no further need of his treatments. She sent him, by return messenger, four pages of apologies and protestations, informing him that she would wait in all day long the day after tomorrow, which was a Sunday:

*. . . . M. Larousselle will be at the bull-fight; he knows how little I care for that kind of entertainment. Come share my bite. I shall wait for you till 5:30.*

Never had the doctor received from her a letter that was less stilted or that had less to do with her health and his treatments. He read it over a number of times, and often touched it as it lay in his pocket, being convinced that this interview would not turn out to be like all the others, and that he would be able to avow his passion at last. But inasmuch as this man of science had more than once made

note of the fact that presentiments do not come true, he now reassured himself: "No, no, this is not a presentiment; there is nothing illogical in this attitude of expectation. I wrote her a spiteful letter, and she replied with a friendly one; and so, it is up to me to see to it that the very first words that are spoken give the conversation a more intimate, a more confidential turn. . . ."

In his carriage, between the laboratory and the hospital, he acted out this interview, tirelessly framing the questions and replies. The doctor was one of those imaginative souls who never read novels for the reason that no fiction is worth as much to them as the dramas which they themselves invent and in which they play the leading rôles. His prescription once signed, he was no sooner on his patient's stair than, like a dog running to dig up a buried bone, he was at once back with his imaginings, of which he was a trifle ashamed at times—fanciful dramas, in which the timid author tasted the joy of bending individuals and things to his own all-powerful will. In the mental sphere, this conscientious gentleman knew nothing that could stop him; he recoiled from no massacres however frightful—even to the point of mentally wiping out his entire family, by way of creating for himself a different sort of existence.

If, during the two days which preceded his interview with Maria Cross, he made no effort to avoid suggestions of this kind, it was because, in the episode which he was now joyously engaged in creating, there was no need of doing away with any one—but, simply, of breaking with his family, as he had seen certain of his colleagues do, for no better reason than the dismal boredom which was his from living with them. At the age of fifty-two, there was still time to enjoy a few years of happiness, a happiness, it might be, poisoned with regrets—but why should one who had never had any variety—why should such a one hold back from so much as the shadow of joy? His presence did not even serve to make his wife happy, as bitter a wife as man ever had. . . . His daughter, his son? He had given up, a long while since, any idea of being loved by them. The affection of his children, ah! ever since Madeleine's engagement, he knew to his cost what that was. As for Raymond, that which was utterly unattainable was not worth one's sacrifice.

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The doctor was fully aware that this play of his imagination in which he found so much pleasure was something

quite different from his accustomed daydreamings. Even when he, at one fell stroke, wiped out an entire family, he felt, undoubtedly, some shame but no remorse—he, rather, had the feeling of being faintly ridiculous. All this was a superficial diversion, with which his deepest self was not concerned. No, he never had thought himself capable of being a monster, and did not believe that he was any different from other men, who, according to his own statement, were all mad the moment they found themselves alone with their selves and beyond the control of others.

But during the forty-eight hours he lived through while waiting for that Sunday to come, he perceived clearly enough that he was clinging with all the strength he had to a dream, and that his dream had become a hope. He could hear in his heart the echoes of the next conversation which he was to have with this woman, and he now scarcely could conceive how any words other than those which he had invented could be uttered between them. He was incessantly retouching the plot, the gist of which was comprised in this dialogue:

“We have both of us reached the end of a blind-alley, Maria. All we can do is to die with our backs to the wall or live by retracing our steps. You could not love me, you

who have never known what love is. The only thing left is to give yourself to the one man who is capable of demanding nothing in exchange for his affection."

At this point, he thought he could hear Maria's protestations:

"But you are mad! What about your wife, your children?"

"They do not need me. One who has been buried alive surely has the right, if he is able, to lift the stone that is smothering him. You never could know the extent of the desert which separates me from that wife, from that daughter, from that son. The words which I speak to them, they no longer hear. Animals, when their little ones are grown, wean them; and what is more, the males, as a general rule, do not know their own offspring. Those feelings which survive the function are an invention of man. Christ knew this, when he decreed that he was to be preferred to all fathers and all mothers, and who went so far as to boast that he had come to separate husband from wife and children from those who had brought them into the world."

"But you don't imagine that you are God?"

"Am I not His image, in your eyes? Do you not owe to

me your striving after a certain perfection?" (Here, the doctor interrupted himself with "No, no, I mustn't lug in metaphysics!")

"But your position? Your patients? That life you lead as a public benefactor . . . think what a scandal. . . ."

"If I were to die, they would have to get along without me. Who is indispensable? And that is exactly what I must do, Maria: die; die to this impoverished and laborious life of a recluse, to be reborn with you. My wife would keep the fortune which is hers by right; and I would have no difficulty in providing for you; they have just offered me a chair at Alger and another at Santiago. . . . I should leave my children whatever I have been able to lay aside up to now. . . ."

At this point of the imaginary scene, the carriage stopped in front of the hospital; the doctor's air was still an absent-minded one as he crossed the threshold, and his eyes those of a man who is just coming out of a mysterious spell. His visit over, he returned to his dream, filled with a secret avidity, as he murmured: "I'm a fool . . . and yet. . . ." He knew certain ones among his colleagues who had realized this beautiful dream. It is true that the disorderly lives they previously had led had prepared public opinion .

for the scandal which ensued; whereas the whole town would maintain that Dr. Courrèges was a saint. But what of it! What a relief not to have to endure the undeserved burden of a reputation he had wrongly got! Ah! to be despised, in short! He would then be in a position to address other words to Maria Cross—something besides moral admonitions and edifying counsels; he would be a man who is in love with a woman, and who takes her by force.

\* \* \*

The sun that Sunday rose at last. It was the doctor's habit on that day to make only such calls as were absolutely necessary. He did not go to the office, constantly besieged by patients, which he kept in town, but of which he only made use three times a week, for consultations. He had a horror of that ground-floor of a building entirely occupied by offices; he would have been incapable, he said, of reading or writing a line there. Just as at Lourdes, the most wretched of votive offerings find a place, so the doctor had assembled between these four walls all those remembrances with which his grateful patients had showered him. After

having spent his hate upon those art-bronzes, those Austrian terra-cottas, those marble-dust loves, those semi-vitrified porcelains, and those barometer-calendars, he had come to take a sort of fancy to this horrible collection, and to rejoice when he received a "work of art" of an extraordinary degree of ugliness. "Be sure that it's nothing old," the patients who were anxious to please Dr. Courrèges would say to one another.

On this Sunday, when, he was convinced, an interview with Maria Cross was going to alter his destiny, he had, contrary to custom, agreed to see at his office, at about three o'clock, a neurasthenic business man who was unable to obtain a single hour of leisure in the course of the week. The doctor had resigned himself to it; he might be able, thus, to leave as soon as lunch was over, and to put to his own use those last moments preceding the one he so ardently awaited, and which he so feared. He did not order his carriage nor make any attempt to board the invaded tramcars. Human clusters were clinging to the steps, for there was a rugby match that day, as well as the first *corrida* of the year, and the names of Algabeno and Fuentes were flaming from all the red and yellow posters. Although the fight was not due to begin until four o'clock,

the crowd already, in the lifeless Sunday streets with their closed shops, was pouring toward the arena. The young folks wore *canotiers* with colored streamers, light gray straw hats which they believed to be Spanish, and their laughter rose in a cloud of "shag." The cafés breathed into the street their cool absinthe breath. The doctor could not remember ever having made his way before through a crowd like this, with no other thought than that of killing the time which lay between the present and a certain time to come. How strange such an interval of unemployment seemed to an overworked man! He was not gifted with the knack of doing nothing, wanted to think of the experiment which he had begun, but was unable to see with his inner eyes anything but Maria Cross lying stretched out with a book.

The sun suddenly disappeared from sight, and the anxious throng fastened its eyes upon a heavy cloud in the sky. Some one made out as though he had felt a drop; but the sun burst forth once more. No, the storm would not break before the sufferings of the last bull were over.

It was possible, the doctor reflected, that things would not come about exactly as he had imagined they would; but the one thing certain—mathematically certain—was

that he would not part from Maria Cross before she knew his secret; the question would be popped at last! Half past two . . . an hour yet to kill before the consultation. He fondled his laboratory key in the bottom of his pocket. No, he would barely be there before he would have to leave. The crowd now stirred, as to a sudden breeze; and there were cries of "There they are!" In old victorias, the coachmen of which were covered with grime and glory, the gleaming matadors and their *quadrillas* were to be seen. The doctor was astonished not to discern any trace of abjectness on those stern, emaciated countenances; a weird clergy they were, in red and gold, violet and silver! Once more, a cloud slew the light, and the matadors raised their thin faces toward the tarnished blue. The doctor, having pushed his way through the crowd, was now going down a series of narrow, deserted streets. It was as cool as a cellar in his office, where the terra-cotta and alabaster women smiled down from their malachite pillars. An old-style clock, in its ticking, was falling behind a little imitation-Delftware timepiece in the center of the wide table, where a "modern-style" woman, her behind resting upon a block of crystal, was doing duty as a paper-weight. These figurines appeared to be chanting, in chorus, the title of a

revue which the doctor had seen advertised on all the corners about town: "*There's Nothing Like It!*"—even to the mock-bronze bull, with his snout resting upon his cow companion. The doctor, out of a corner of his eye, admired his collection, and gave a low-voiced verdict: "the most degraded era of the human race." He pushed back a shutter to let in a dusty ray of light, then made the rounds of the room, rubbing his hands and saying: "No preparation is required, but the very first words must drop a hint as to my distress when I thought she did not want to see me any more. She will be astonished; I will assure her that I cannot go on living without her; and then, perhaps, perhaps. . . ."

The bell rang, and the doctor went to open the door himself, and came back with his patient. Ah! this one would not interrupt his musing; all he had to do was to let the neurasthenic ramble on; the latter appeared to demand nothing of his physicians except the patience to hear him out. He must have entertained of them a mystic idea of some sort, for he balked at no confidence, and did not hesitate to reveal his most secret sore. The doctor already had made a mental return to Maria Cross' side: "I am a man, Maria, a poor flesh-and-blood man like the rest. One

cannot go on living without happiness; I have made the discovery too late—but not too late for you to consent to come with me, I hope?” His patient having finished, the doctor with that air of noble dignity which the public found so admirable, delivered himself of the following speech:

“First of all, you must have faith in your own will-power. If you do not believe that you are free, I can do nothing for you. All the science at my command is without avail in the presence of a false idea like that. If you believe yourself to be the impotent prey of heredity, what do you hope for from me? Before we go any further, I demand an act of faith in your own power to overcome all those bestial selves within you which are not your true self.”

While the man was spiritedly breaking into this speech, the doctor arose, strolled over to the window and pretended to be looking out, between the half-closed shutters, into the empty street. He had what amounted to a horror of these lying words of his, words surviving a belief that was some while dead. Just as we receive the light of a star that has been extinct for ages, so did the souls around him still listen to the echo of a faith that was no longer his.

He came back to the table and, perceiving by the little imitation-Delftware timepiece that it was four o'clock, dismissed his patient.

"I have plenty of time," the doctor told himself, as he fairly ran out onto the sidewalk. As he reached the Place de la Comédie, he saw the tram being stormed by a mob which the cinemas had just let out. Not a fiacre in sight. There was nothing to do but form in line, meanwhile incessantly consulting his watch. Accustomed to his carriage, he had miscalculated the margin of time at his disposal. He endeavored to reassure himself now; at the very worst, he would be not more than half an hour late, and that was nothing at all for a physician. Maria had always waited. . . . Yes, but in her letter, she had said "till five-thirty" . . . five o'clock already! "Hey, there! Don't shove like that! Where do you think you are!" This from a squat and angry lady whose plume was tickling the end of his nose. In the hot and stuffy tramcar, he regretted having put his coat on, and, beginning to perspire, was afraid that he would have a dirty face and an unpleasant odor.

It had not yet struck six when he got off at the Talence church. He at once quickened his steps, and then, crazed with anxiety, started to run, which did his heart no good.

A storm-cloud was wrapping the heavens in darkness. The last bull must be bleeding to death under that somber sky. Between the gratings of the little gardens, dusty lilac-boughs were waiting for the rain with outstretched hands. The doctor ran on, in a mild spattering of drops, toward the woman whom he already could see reclining at length on her chaise-longue and not at once raising her eyes from her open book. . . . But as he drew near the gate, he suddenly saw her coming out. They stopped short; she was out of breath, for she had been running like himself.

She remarked to him, with an air of being subtly put out: "I said in my note, five-thirty."

He enveloped her in a clear-seeing gaze:

"You've left off your mourning."

She glanced down at her summery dress, and replied:

"I suppose that mauve is not half-mourning, then?"

How different she was, even now, from what he had imagined she would be! A tremendous cowardice lay behind his next words:

"Since you were not counting on me any longer, and since you have an appointment with some one else, we'll put it off to another time."

Her answer was very brisk:

"With whom should I have an appointment? You are funny, Doctor."

She went back toward the house, and he followed her. She permitted her mauve-taffeta dress to trail in the dust, and as she lowered her head, he had a glimpse of her neck. She was reflecting that the only reason she had made an appointment with the doctor for Sunday was that she had felt sure the strange lad, on that day, would not take the six o'clock tram. Frantic, however, with joy and hope, when the doctor had failed to put in an appearance at the hour she had named, she had run out at all hazards, assuring herself:

"There's only one chance in a thousand that he has taken the usual car, on account of me. . . . Ah! I must not miss that thrill. . . ." Alas! she was never to know that the strange lad, on that Sunday, *had* sat in the six o'clock tram, mournful at not seeing her there. A heavy rain was beating upon the steps, as she hastily climbed them to enter the house; behind her, she could hear the old man's wheezing. Ah! the importunity of those individuals in whom our hearts are not in the least interested, who have chosen us, and whom we have not chosen!—so utterly extraneous to us that we feel no desire to know !

anything whatsoever about them, whose death would be quite as much a matter of indifference to us as are their lives . . . and yet, those are the very ones that fill up our existence.

They crossed the diningroom, and she pushed back the livingroom shutters, took off her hat, stretched herself out, and smiled up at the doctor, who was desperately searching for some faint shred of those speeches he had so nicely prepared. She was the first to speak:

"You are out of breath. . . . I walked too fast for you."

"I'm not so old as all that."

He lifted his eyes, as he invariably did, to the mirror above the chaise-longue. What, didn't he know his own face yet? Why, every time, that blow to the heart, that desolate feeling of stupefaction, as though he had expected to see his youth smiling back at him? Already, he was inquiring "And how are you feeling?" in that paternal, rather grave tone of voice which he always assumed in speaking to Maria Cross. She had never felt so well in her life, and she found a compensatory pleasure in informing the doctor of the fact. No, the strange lad, on this particular Sunday, would not be in the tram. But tomorrow—tomorrow, he undoubtedly would be there; she could think.

of nothing but the pleasure in store for her, the hope, each day deceived and each day born again, that something new would happen, and that he would speak to her at last.

"You may safely leave off your injections. . . ." (He beheld in the glass that scraggly beard, that barren brow, and remembered his glowing speeches.)

"I am able to sleep; I am no longer bored, Doctor, just think of that; and yet, I have no desire to read. I haven't finished yet with the *Voyage de Sparte*; you may take it back with you when you go."

"You never see any one at all?"

"Do you think I am the sort of woman to go out, suddenly, and start compromising myself with the mistresses of those fellows—I, who have always avoided them, up to now, like the plague? I am the only one of my kind at Bordeaux, as you very well know; and I cannot afford to keep company with anybody."

It was true that she had often made the statement before; but in the past, it had been uttered as a complaint, never with an air so peaceful, so contented. The doctor perceived that this slow flame was no longer leaping up toward the heavens, that it was no longer spending itself in vain, but that it had found, very close to earth, some

fuel unknown to him. He could not refrain from remarking, in an aggrieved tone, that if she did not see the ladies, she must sometimes see the gentlemen in question. He felt his cheeks turn red, as he foresaw that the conversation might now take the turn which he had so ardently desired; and as a matter of fact, Maria did, laughingly, inquire:

"Ah, ha! Doctor, you are not jealous, are you? I do believe he's going to cause a scene! . . . No, no, I was only joking," she added at once; "I know you too well for that."

How was he to doubt that she was inwardly laughing at him, that she found it difficult to conceive the doctor's harboring any sentiment of that sort? She looked at him, uneasily:

"I haven't hurt you?"

"Yes, Maria, you have hurt me."

But she did not understand what hurt it was of which he wished to speak; she hastened to reassure him of her respect, her veneration. Had he not stooped to her? Had he not, at times, deigned to raise her to his own level? With a gesture as false as her words, she seized the doctor's hand and brought it near her lips. He quickly withdrew it; and Maria Cross, offended, rose and stood by the win-

dow, looking at the rain-drenched garden. The doctor also had risen; and she spoke to him without turning:

"Wait until the shower is over."

He remained standing in the dark livingroom. Methodical fellow that he was, he made use of this atrocious moment to uproot in himself all desire, all hope. Oh, well, that was over; nothing that concerned this woman concerned him any more; he was out of it. His hand made, in the void, the gesture of a clean-sweep. Maria now turned to him:

"It's not raining now."

And as he stood there motionless, she added that she did not mean to be showing him the door, but that it might be well to take advantage of this lull. She offered to let him have an umbrella, which he at first accepted and then refused, for the reason that, greatly to his own disgust, the thought had occurred to him: "It would only have to be brought back, and that would mean an excuse for coming again."

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He was in no pain; he was enjoying the end of the storm, thinking of himself, or rather of that particular

portion of himself, as of a friend for whose death one consoles one's self by reflecting that the other's sufferings are over. The game had been played and lost; there was nothing to be done about that; nothing, hereafter, was to count for him except his work. Only yesterday, they had telephoned him from the laboratory that the dog had not survived the removal of his pancreas. Would Robinson be able to get another one from the dog-pound? Tramcars passed him, laden with a weary but singing throng; but he was satisfied to be walking along in this lilac-filled suburb, which, by reason of the rain and the twilight, smelled like the real country. He was through suffering, through with hurling himself like a madman against the walls of his dungeon. That all-powerful force which, ever since his childhood, the propinquity of certain beings had been able to call up outside himself, he now brought back and pressed down into the inmost recesses of his being. An absolute renunciation. In spite of sign-boards and gleaming rails, in spite of cyclists bent over their lilac-strung handlebars, the suburb was now sloughing off into the country, and the wineshops were becoming inns, filled with mule-drivers who would set out again by the light of the moon, and who would jolt along all night, stretched out like dead.

men in their carts, their faces to the stars. Upon the doorsteps, children who were already peasants were playing with torpid may-bugs. Not to hurl himself against a wall any more! How many years was it, now, since he first had grown accustomed to that dreary assault? He saw himself once more as he came in panting (that was very nearly half a century ago) to his mother's bedside, one morning when school had just reopened. She had upbraided him with "Aren't you ashamed to be crying like that, you little lazy-bones, you little dunce?" and he had not been able to make her understand that his tears sprang solely from his despair at being separated from her; and later. . . . He outlined again the gesture of the broom, of cleaning house. "We shall see," he told himself, "tomorrow morning. . . ." And as though giving an injection of morphine, he proceeded now to inoculate himself with his daily task. That dead dog . . . everything to be done over again. Ought he not, by this time, to have made enough observations to confirm his hypothesis? How much time he had lost! What a shame it was! He, who believed that the whole human race was interested in every gesture he made in his laboratory—how many days he had squandered! Science demands to be served with passion; she will suffer no divi-

sion of affections. "Pshaw! I shall never be more than half a scientist!" He thought he could see a light through the branches; it was the moon coming up. He could see the trees which hid the house where were gathered those whom he had a right to call "my people." How many times had he proved false to that vow which he now renewed in his heart: "From this night on, I will make Lucie happy?" And he quickened his steps, being impatient to prove to himself that, this once, he would not weaken. He forced himself to think of their first meeting, twenty-five years ago, in a garden at Arcachon, a meeting which had been arranged by one of his colleagues. But as he looked within himself, it was not his betrothed of that distant day, that pale and faded photograph, that he saw; it was a young woman who had put on half-mourning, frantic with joy because he was late, and hastening to meet another—what other? The doctor felt a sharp pain and paused for a second, then began running, in order to put as much distance as possible between himself and that creature with whom Maria Cross was in love; and he did feel a relief, just as though each step, without his being conscious of it, had not brought him nearer his unknown rival. . . . Yet, it was this same evening that, barely having crossed the

diningroom threshold, to the sound of Raymond and his brother-in-law's quarrel, he was to have thrust upon him the consciousness of a flowering, a sudden springtime, in that world outside himself which he had brought into the world.

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They had risen from the table, and the children were holding up their foreheads for the distracted lips of the adults. The young ones then went to their rooms, escorted by mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Raymond had sauntered over to the casement window, and the doctor could not help being struck by the gesture which the young man made in taking a cigarette from his leather case, tapping it down and lighting it; a rosebud dangled from his buttonhole, and his trousers displayed the required crease. The doctor thought: "It is astonishing how much he resembles my poor dear father. . . ." Yes, Raymond was the very picture of that distinguished surgeon who, up to the age of seventy, had run through, with women, the fortune which he had accumulated through the practice of his profession. He had been the first to

popularize at Bordeaux the benefits of antisepsis. He never had paid the least bit of attention to his son, whom he never referred to in any other manner than as "the youngster," as though he had not been able to remember the lad's first name. A woman had brought him home one evening, his mouth distorted and driveling; they had not been able to find either his watch or his pocketbook, nor the diamond ring which he wore on his little finger. "I have inherited from him only a heart apt for passion, but not his ability to please—that will be for his grandson."

The doctor looked Raymond over, as the latter stood gazing out into the garden—this man who was his son. After that feverish day, he would have loved to bestow a confidence; or rather, he would have relished a moment of affection; he would have liked to ask his son: "Why is it that we never have anything to say to each other? Is it because you think I should not be able to understand you? Is there, then, so great a distance as all that between father and son? What, after all, are those twenty-five years that separate us? I have the same heart that I had at twenty, and you are my offspring. There must be many inclinations, distastes, temptations that we have in common . . . who will be the first to break this silence between us?"

For man and woman, however far apart they may be from each other, still may meet in an embrace; and even a mother can draw her grown son's head down to her and kiss his hair; but a father—he can do nothing, except make the gesture which Dr. Courrèges did, in laying his hand upon Raymond's shoulder. The young man startled, and turned to face his father, who, with searching eyes, inquired:

“Is it still raining?”

Raymond, standing upon the sill, stretched an arm out into the night.

“No, it's not raining any more.”

He flung after him, without a backward look: “Good night”; and the sound of his footsteps died away.

Madame Courrèges was astounded, when her husband asked her if she would not like to take a stroll in the garden. She would go look for a shawl, she said. He heard her going upstairs and then coming down with an unwonted haste.

“Take my arm, Lucie; the moon is under a cloud; you can't see a thing.”

"But the lane is light."

As she leaned upon him slightly, he made note of the fact that Lucie's flesh had the same scent as when they were first engaged, when they had sat upon a bench those long June evenings . . . it was the very perfume of his lover's days, that mingled scent of flesh and shade.

He asked her if she had not noticed the great change which had been taking place in their son. No, so far as she could see, he was just as sulky, as grumbling and as stubborn as ever. He persisted: but Raymond did not let himself go so much; he exhibited more self-control—if only in the care which he, of late, had been taking of his person.

"Ah, yes, I wanted to speak of that. Julie was scolding only yesterday because he insisted that she press his trousers twice a week."

"Just try to reason with Julie, who's known Raymond ever since he was born. . . ."

"Julie is very fond of him, but fondness has its limits. Madeleine is right when she says that her servants are good for nothing. Julie has an ugly disposition, that's true enough; but I can understand her being furious at having to do the servants' stair and a part of the front stairs, too."

A parsimonious nightingale gave out three notes and

was silent. They were strolling through the bitter-almond perfume of a hawthorne tree. The doctor tried again:

"Our Raymond. . . ."

"We'll never be able to find anybody else to take Julie's place; that's what we have to remember. It may be true that she causes all the cooks we have to pack up and leave; but very often, she's right. . . . Take Léonie. . . ."

The doctor inquired, in a resigned tone:

"Which Léonie?"

"You know very well, the big one . . . no, not the last one . . . the one who only stayed for three months; she didn't want to do the diningroom. And yet, that wasn't Julie's work. . . ."

"Servants nowadays aren't what they used to be."

He felt within himself the ebbing of a tide, a backflow that took with it confidences, confessions, all self-abandonment, and tears.

"We'd better be going back. . . ."

"Madeleine keeps telling me that the cook's impossible, but that's not Julie's fault. The girl wants a raise. They don't make as much here as they do in town, although we do have three big markets; if it weren't for that, they wouldn't stay."

"I'm going in."

"Already?"

She felt that she had failed him, that she should have waited and let him do the talking; she murmured:

"We don't have a talk like this so often. . . ."

Beyond the paltry words which, in spite of herself, she had gone on uttering, beyond that wall which her untiring vulgarity had erected, day by day, Lucie Courrèges could not help hearing that muffled call of a being entombed alive; yes, she could hear that cry of a buried miner; and in herself, also—but how deep down!—there was a voice which answered that other voice, a feeling of tenderness that stirred.

She went to lay her head upon her husband's shoulder, but felt his body being drawn away and was conscious of his tight-shut face. She glanced up toward the house, and could not restrain herself from saying:

"You've left the light burning in your room again."

She regretted having said it, the moment it was out of her mouth. He was hastening to get away from her, ran rapidly up the steps, and gave a sigh of relief when he found the drawingroom deserted; it meant that he could make his way to his study without meeting any one. There,

at last, seated at his work-table, he creased his debilitated face with both his hands, and once more made the gesture of the broom. . . . It was annoying, that dog's being dead; it was not so easy to get another one. What was more, with all these silly concerns, he had not been keeping as close an eye on things as he should have been. "I have left too much to Robinson . . . he must be wrong about the date of that last inoculation." It was better to begin all over again, on a new basis. . . . That would be quite all right, as soon as Robinson had taken the animal's temperature and made a urine-analysis.

## CHAPTER VI

A BREAK in the current had brought the tramway to a stop, and the cars stood there, lined up along the boulevards, like a procession of yellow caterpillars. This incident was necessary in order to bring Raymond Courrèges and Maria Cross together at last. On the day following that Sunday when they had not seen each other, the anguished prospect of their never meeting again had harassed the two of them, and each had resolved to take the initiative. But she saw in him an ingenuous schoolboy, who would be scandalized over nothing at all; while he—how was he to bring himself to speak to a woman? He made her out in the crowd, even though, for the first time, she had come clad in a light-colored dress, while she, although a trifle short-sighted, recognized him from a distance; for he had had to put on that day, for some occasion or other, his school-uniform, and his unbuttoned cape was tossed negligently over his shoulders (in imitation of the students of the *École de Santé Navale*). Passengers were reboarding

the tram with the intention of waiting, while others walked away in little groups. Raymond and Maria met near the step. She spoke in a low tone and without looking at him, in such a manner that he might believe, if he chose, that she was not addressing her remark to him:

"After all, I don't have so far to go. . . ."

And he, his head turned a little to one side, his cheeks aflame:

"For once, I shouldn't mind doing it on foot."

Then it was she had the courage to let her eyes rest upon that face which she never had beheld at so close range:

"Seeing how long it is we have been making the trip together, we really oughtn't to let ourselves get out of practice."

They took a few steps in silence. She stole a glance at those burning cheeks, that young flesh which bled at the razor's touch. With a gesture that was still boyish, he supported, with both hands over his back, a worn school-bag filled with books; and the idea took root in her that he was, almost, a child; at which reflection, she experienced a confused emotion, made up of conscientious scruples, a feeling of shame and a sense of delight. As for him, he felt crippled by timidity, as paralyzed as he had been when

it appeared a superhuman feat to cross the threshold of a shop. He was dumbfounded to find that he was taller than she. Her mauve-hued straw hat hid almost the whole of her face, but he was afforded a glimpse of her bare neck and a bit of shoulder which protruded from her frock. He was terrified at not being able to find a single word with which to break the silence, at letting this moment go to waste:

"You don't live very far from here, do you?"

"No, the Talence church is ten minutes from the boulevards."

Having taken from his pocket an ink-stained handkerchief and mopped his forehead with it, he saw the ink and hid the handkerchief.

"But you, Monsieur, perhaps you have a longer journey. . . ."

"Oh, no, I get off right after the church." And he made haste to add: "I am young Courrèges."

"The doctor's son?"

He spoke with a glow of pride: "He's well known, isn't he?"

As she lifted her head to look at him, he saw that she had turned pale. However, she contrived to say:

"The world is a small place, after all . . . but don't say anything to him about me."

"I never talk to him about anything; and what's more, I don't know who you are."

"It would be better for you not to know."

Once more, she gazed at him, long and hard. The doctor's son! He could not be anything but a very simple and very pious schoolboy. He would flee in horror when he knew her name. But how could he help knowing it? Young Bertrand Larousselle had been in the same school, up to last year. . . . Maria Cross' name ought to be notorious there. . . . He persisted, less out of curiosity than from fear of the silence:

"Yes, go ahead and tell me your name. . . . I've told you mine. . . ."

At a shop-door, the horizontal light came to rest upon a pile of oranges in a display-basket. The gardens were fairly sticky with dust; a bridge spanned the railway which once had so moved Raymond, because the trains on it ran to Spain. Maria Cross was thinking: "If I tell him who I am, I may lose him . . . but is it not my duty to send him away?" She suffered and reveled in this inner debate. She

was really suffering, but it was a gloomy satisfaction to sigh: "It's tragic!"

"When you know who I am. . . ." (She could not resist thinking of Psyche and Lohengrin.)

He burst out laughing, boisterously—but with abandonment at last:

"We should go on meeting just the same in the tram. . . . You have noticed that I always make it a point to take the six o'clock . . . haven't you? What's the joke? Because, you know, I sometimes get there in time for the quarter-of . . . but I always let it go by on account of you. And even yesterday, I left after the fourth bull, so as not to miss you; of course, you weren't there, and it seems that Fuentes was simply great in the final. Now that we've spoken to each other, what difference can it make what your name is? I didn't use to give a hang for anything . . . but ever since I knew that you were looking at me. . . ."

This language, which Maria would have looked upon as so vulgar in any other, held for her now, she discovered, a deliciously youthful flavor; and later, every time she crossed the road at this point, she was to remember the feelings which a schoolboy's sorry words had let loose in her—a feeling of tenderness, of happiness. . . .

"You really must tell me your name . . . and anyway, all I should have to do would be to ask Dad. That would be easy: a lady who always gets off at the Talence church."

"I will tell you, but you must give me your word that you will never speak of me to the doctor."

She had her doubts, now, as to her name's being able to drive him away; but she pretended to believe that there was still a danger. "We will leave it all to fate," she said, for, in her heart, she knew that she was sure of winning. Shortly before reaching the church, she asked him to go on ahead, "on account of the tradespeople who would recognize us and start circulating stories."

"All right, but not until I know. . . ."

She uttered it quickly, without looking at him: "Maria Cross."

"Maria Cross?"

She was making holes in the earth with her umbrella, and added in some haste:

"Wait until you know me."

He looked at her, dazzled.

"Maria Cross!"

So it was she, that woman whose name he had heard whispered, one summer's day in the Allées de Tourny, at

the time when the crowd was coming back from the races. . . . She was passing in her two-horse barouche . . . some one near him was saying: "Women like that, oh well!" And he also suddenly recalled the period when he was in the habit of leaving school at four o'clock, on account of a course of baths which he was taking. On the road, one day, he had passed Bertrand Larousselle, full of arrogance, young as he was, his long legs gaitered in fawn-colored leather, and escorted sometimes by a servant and sometimes by a black-gloved and high-collared priest. Of all the "big boys," Raymond enjoyed among the "middle-formers" a terrific prestige; and the pious and innocent little Bertrand proceeded to devour the "nasty fellow" with his eyes, as the latter passed him, without suspecting that, in the nasty fellow's eyes, he was himself a child of mystery. Madame Victor Larousselle was still living at this time, and absurd rumors were current about the town and the school. Maria Cross, it was said, was bent upon being married, and had demanded of her lover that he put his whole family in the poorhouse; while others asserted that she was merely waiting until Madame Larousselle had died of cancer, so that she could have a church wedding. Several times, behind a carriage-pane, Raymond had caught

a glimpse of that anemic mother, of whom the ladies of the Courrèges and Basque households would say: "There goes one who has suffered! What dignity in her martyrdom! She, surely, has had her purgatory on earth. . . . If I had a husband like that, I'd spit in his face, I'd put him. . . ." One day, Bertrand Larousselle went out alone. He had not gone far before he heard the nasty fellow whistling behind him, and he at once began to hurry; but Raymond regulated his pace to suit that of his prey, and never took his eyes off that short overcoat and pretty English-cloth cap. How affected everything about this child seemed to him! Little Bertrand having started to run, a copy-book slipped out of his school-bag, and before he noticed, Raymond had picked it up. The lad came back, pale with fear and wrath: "Give it to me!" But Raymond was sneeringly reading out the title on the back: *My Diary*.

"That ought to be very interesting, young Larousselle's diary. . . ."

"Give it to me."

Raymond, on the run, darted through the gate of the Parc Bordelais and took a deserted lane; behind him, he could hear a feeble voice panting: "Give it to me! I'll tell on you!"

The nasty fellow, in the shelter of a cluster of foliage, now turned to beard young Larousselle, who was quite out of breath, and who, throwing himself upon the grass, began sobbing violently.

"Here, there's your copy-book . . . your diary . . . idiot!"

He picked the lad up, dried his eyes and dusted off the English overcoat. What an unlooked for touch of gentleness in that roughneck! Young Larousselle appeared to appreciate it, and was smiling up at Raymond, when the latter, unable to resist a coarse whim, blurted out:

"Listen, did you ever see Maria Cross?"

Bertrand, turning scarlet, had picked up his bag and was off, before Raymond even so much as thought of giving chase.

Maria Cross . . . it was she who was now engaged in feasting her eyes upon him. . . . He would have expected to find her taller, more mysterious. So, this little woman in mauve was Maria Cross. Conscious of Raymond's silent questioning, Maria, with an air of humility, stammered:

"Don't believe. . . . Whatever you do, don't go believing. . . ."

She trembled in the presence of this judge, who appeared to her as angelic. She did not distinguish the age of impurity; she was not aware that spring is oftentimes the muddy season, and that youth may mean pollution. She did not have the strength to endure the contempt which she imagined this boy must feel for her, and with a good-bye that was little more than a whisper, she had fled; but he caught up with her:

"Tomorrow evening, then, on the same car?"

"If you like."

As she walked away, she turned twice, to find him standing there, lost in thought: "Maria Cross has a crush on me." He repeated the words, as though he could not believe his luck: "Maria Cross has a crush on me."

He breathed in the evening air, as though it held the essence of the universe, and as though he felt himself capable of taking that essence into his own dilated body. Maria Cross had a crush on him. . . . Should he tell the other fellows? But nobody would believe him. He could now see the dense leafy prison within which the members of a single family dwelt together, as near to and far from one another as those worlds which go to make up the Milky Way. Ah! that constellation was not to be seen in

all its glory this evening. He circled around and took shelter in a pine-wood, the only one that was not closed off, and which was known as the Bois de Berge. The earth on which he lay was warmer than a human body, and the pine-needles hollowed out mystic signs in the palms of his hands.

\* \* \*

As he entered the diningroom, his father was cutting the pages of a magazine and replying to a remark from his wife: "I'm not reading; I'm only glancing at the titles." No one seemed to hear Raymond's greeting except his grandmother:

"Ah! there's my rascal now. . . ."

And as he passed the old lady's chair, she detained him and drew him down:

"You smell of resin."

"I've been in the Bois de Berge."

She coughed knowingly, and affectionately mumbled the insulting syllable: "Scum!"

He sat down and started lapping up his soup like a dog. How little all these people appeared to him! He was sailing

in the sun. His father alone was close to him; the doctor knew Maria Cross, he did! He had been at her house, had treated her, had seen her in bed, had rested his head upon her bosom and against her back. . . . Maria Cross! Maria Cross! The name throttled him, like a blood-clot; he could feel in his mouth the mild and salty warmth of it; its gentle surge inflated his cheeks, and at last burst from him:

"I saw Maria Cross this evening."

The doctor at once began staring him out of countenance, and inquired: "How did you know it was she?"

"I was with Papillon, who knows her by sight."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Basque. "Raymond is red as a beet!" And one of the little girls repeated: "Yes, yes, uncle Raymond's red as a beet!"

He shrugged his shoulders, grumblingly, as his father with averted eyes put another question: "Was she alone?"

When Raymond replied "Alone", the doctor went back to cutting his pages. But Madame Courrèges could not let the occasion pass:

"It is a curious thing how women like that interest you more than the other kind. Is there anything so extraordinary in having seen that creature pass? Back in the

days when she was a chamber-maid, you wouldn't have given her so much as a look."

The doctor broke in: "But she never was a chamber-maid, you know!"

"And moreover," Madeleine hastily proclaimed, "it wouldn't be any disgrace to her, if she had been; quite the contrary."

As the maid left the room with a dish, Madeleine addressed her mother with asperity:

"One would think you were deliberately trying to put the servants in a bad humor, to offend them. Irma happens to be very sensitive."

"It's unbelievable. . . . You have to put on gloves nowadays. . . ."

"Treat your own servants any way you like, but don't be sending those of others packing . . . especially when you expect them to do the serving."

"As if you put yourself out any for Julie, you who have the reputation of never being able to keep a maid. . . . Everybody knows that when mine go off it's on account of yours. . . ."

The maid's reappearance interrupted the argument, which was furtively resumed the moment she had gone.

back to the kitchen. Raymond took pleasure in observing his father. Had Maria Cross been a chamber-maid, would she still have been some one in his eyes? The doctor suddenly looked up, and without directing his gaze at any one, announced:

"Maria Cross is the daughter of that governess who used to be in charge of the Saint-Clair school at the time your dear Monsieur Labrousse was curate there, Lucie."

"What? That vixen who caused him all that trouble, who refused to go to mass unless she and her pupils were permitted to occupy the front rows in the nave? Oh, well, there's nothing astonishing in that. Blood will tell."

"Do you remember," spoke up Grandmother Courrèges, "poor Monsieur Labrousse's telling us how, on election night, when the Marquis of Luc-Saluces had been beaten by a nobody of a lawyer from Bazas, the governess took her whole crew to mock-serenade him, under the very windows of the parsonage, and how, from having touched off so many cannon-crackers in honor of the new deputy, she had her hands all blackened with powder. . . ."

"A fine lot of carryings-on."

But the doctor was not listening now. Instead of going

upstairs to his room, as he did each evening, he followed Raymond out into the garden.

Father and son felt a desire to converse this evening. A certain force unknown to them, was bringing them together, as though they had been keepers of the same secret. As a result, they sought and recognized in each other initiates and accomplices. Each was discovering in the other the one individual with whom he could speak of what lay nearest his heart. As two butterflies miles apart will meet upon the hive that houses the odoriferous female, so these two had followed the converging paths of desire, to come to rest, side by side, upon an invisible Maria Cross.

"Raymond, have you a cigarette? I've forgotten what tobacco tastes like. . . . Thanks. . . . Shall we take a turn?"

He listened, in astonishment, to the sound of his own voice. He was like the victim of a false miracle, who of a sudden sees the wound which he had believed to be healed opening again. Just this morning, in the laboratory, he had experienced that relief which the true-believer finds so enchanting after absolution has been granted. Looking in

his heart for the place where his passion should have been, he no longer found it there. It was, accordingly, with accents solemn and a trifle moralistic that he had spoken to Robinson, whose work, ever since the spring, had been interfered with upon occasion by a certain show-girl whom he had met. "My friend, the scientist possessed of a love for research and with the ambition to win distinction for himself will always look upon the hours and minutes devoted to passion as time wasted. . . ." And when Robinson, tossing back his refractory head of hair and drying the lenses of his binocle upon an acid-eaten blouse, had ventured to object:

"Love, all the same. . . ."

"No, my dear fellow, with the true scholar, it is impossible that, save for passing eclipses, science should not take away all thoughts of love. There will always be lurking regrets, in connection with his most intense gratifications, if all the enthusiasm he possesses has not been directed into scientific channels."

"It is certain," agreed Robinson, "that the majority of great scientists have had their share of sex; but I do not know of any who have led truly passionate lives."

The doctor understood, this evening, why it was this

approbation coming from his disciple had caused him to blush. A word of Raymond's, "I saw Maria Cross" had been sufficient to cause that passion which he had believed to be dead to start stirring in him again. Ah! it had been only sleeping . . . a word dropped by another was enough to awaken and feed it; and there it was, stretching, yawning, and getting to its feet once more. Unable to clasp that which it desired, it stayed its hunger with words. Yes, come what might, the doctor would talk about Maria Cross.

Drawn together by a mutual desire to hymn Maria's praises, father and son, with the first words they spoke, ceased to understand each other. Raymond maintained that a woman of that speed could inspire only horror in the pious ones. He admired her for her brazenness, for her unbridled ambition, for the whole of that dissolute life which he fancied she led. The doctor protested that there was nothing of the courtesan in her, and that one must not believe what people said:

"I know Maria Cross. I may say that, during the last illness of her little François, and afterwards, I was her best friend. . . . I was the recipient of her confidences. . . ."

"Poor Dad! What a treat that must have been! Wasn't it?"

The doctor made an effort at self-control, and went on with some warmth:

"No, my lad, her confidences to me were marked by an extraordinary humility. If there is one person in the world of whom it may be said that the individual's actions bear no resemblance to the individual, that person is Maria. Her downfall was due to an incurable indolence. Her mother, the Saint-Clair governess, was having her prepared to be a *Sevrian*, but her marriage with an adjutant of the 144th put an end to her studies. During her three years of married life, there was nothing that could be said against her; and if her husband had gone on living, she would have been the most respectable and inconspicuous of wives. The only fault he had to find with her was that indolence which made it impossible for her to take an interest in her home. He would grumble a little, she told me, when he came home and found no dinner waiting for him except a dish of vermicelli warmed over on an alcohol lamp. She preferred to read all day long, clad in a torn dressing-gown with her naked feet in slippers. As for the supposed courtesan, if you only knew what a contempt she has for

luxury! Why, it was only a short while back that she made up her mind not to go on using the brougham which Larousselle had given her; and she now takes the tram like everybody else. . . . What are you laughing at? I don't see anything funny in that. . . . Don't laugh like that; it's very annoying. . . . When she found herself a widow with a young child to support, and found that she had to work, you may well imagine how badly treated our 'intellectual' felt herself to be. . . . To her own misfortune, a woman friend of her husband's procured her a position as Larousselle's secretary. Maria had no ulterior motives. But Larousselle, who was pitiless toward his other employes, never said a word to her when she came in late every day; she was given very little work to do; and that was all that was needed to compromise her. By the time she saw how matters stood, it was too late to do anything; every one looked upon her as 'the boss' chicken', and the general hostility made her situation unbearable. She gave Larousselle notice, and that was the moment for which he had been waiting. He offered the young woman, until she should find another place, a position as overseer of his estate on the outskirts of Bordeaux, which he had not been able, or had not cared to rent that year. . . ."

"And she looks upon all that as the soul of innocence?"

"No, she could see plainly enough what his intentions were; but the poor woman had a rent to pay that was above her means; and then, little François had contracted enteritis, and the physician had said that it was absolutely necessary for him to live in the country. The short of it was, she felt so compromised already, that she did not have the courage to give up a windfall like that. She let herself be coerced. . . ."

"That makes a nice story."

"You don't know what you are talking about. She held out for a long time. But what was the use? She could not forbid Larousselle to bring his men friends in of an evening; she was weak and inconsistent in consenting to play the hostess at those dinners of his, I grant you that. But as to those famous Tuesday night dinners, those supposed orgies, I know what happened. . . . There would have been nothing scandalous about them, had it not been for the fact that, at that moment, Madame Larousselle's condition took a turn for the worse. I swear to you, Maria did not know at the time that her employer's wife was in any danger. 'I was not conscious of doing anything wrong,' she told me; 'I had not given M. Larousselle a single favor, not

even a kiss—nothing. What was there reprehensible in sitting at the head of that tableful of fools. . . ? I doubtless experienced a sort of intoxication at cutting a brilliant figure in front of them all; I played at being an *intellectual*. I felt that my employer was proud of me. . . . He had promised to look after the little one. . . .’”

“And she made you swallow all that!”

How simple, poor soul, his father was! But he held it against him for trying to reduce Maria Cross to the proportions of a little governess, flabby and respectable—for having tried to spoil his conquest.

“She did not yield to Larousselle until after his wife’s death; and then, it was out of sheer lassitude, a desperate recklessness—yes, that is the word, and it is her own word: *a desperate recklessness*. She had no illusions, she was very clear-sighted; she had no faith either in the long face he put on as an inconsolable widower or in his vague promises to marry her some day. She knew his sort too well, she told me, to be able to delude herself about them. As a mistress, she did him honor; but as a wife! You know, don’t you, that Larousselle sent young Bertrand to the Collège de Normandie so that the lad would not run the risk of meeting Maria Cross some time? In his heart, he

did not look upon her as any different from those silly geese with whom he every day deceived her. I may also tell you that their physical intimacy was reduced to a minimum, as I happen to know; I am sure of it; I can swear to that, my boy. This was not due to any abstinence on Larousselle's part; even though he may have been mad about Maria, he was not the man to set her up merely 'for show', as they believe at Bordeaux. But she refused herself to him. . . ."

"Well, what's the answer? Is Maria Cross a saint?"

They could not see each other; and yet, each could make out the other's hostility, though they did not raise their voices as they spoke. Brought together for a second by that name, Maria Cross, it was that name which was to sunder them. The man was walking forward with his head in the air; the youth was looking down at the earth and furiously kicking at a pine-cone.

"You think me very stupid; but of the two of us, my boy, it is you who are the simple one. To believe in nothing but evil is not to know men. Yes, you have said it: in Maria Cross, with whose woes I am all too familiar, a saint lies hidden. . . . Yes, it may be: a saint . . . but you would not understand."

"Let me laugh!"

"Another thing, you don't know her; you believe the stories you hear. I know her. . . ."

"And I. . . . I know what I know."

"What do you know?"

The doctor had come to a stop, in the middle of the chestnut-darkened lane; he grasped Raymond's arm.

"Let me go! I know very well that Maria Cross doesn't sleep with Larousselle any more . . . but he's not the only one. . . ."

"Liar!"

Raymond, dumbfounded, could only murmur: "Ah, so . . . but . . ." A suspicion came to him which, barely born, was at once blotted out, or rather, put to sleep. He simply could not bring himself to introduce the element of love into the image which he had formed of this father of his, who was, certainly, exasperating, but who would always remain as he had been in his son's childish eyes: without passions, without sin, untainted by evil, incorruptible, above all other men. He could hear him now, panting in the dark. Then, the doctor made a superhuman effort; and it was in a voice that was almost glad, almost jesting, that he said:

"Yes, liar! You joker, you, you'd take away my illusions, would you?"

And when Raymond did not reply:

"Go on, tell me."

"I don't know anything."

"But you said just now, 'I know what I know.'"

Raymond replied that he was only talking when he had said it; his tone was that of a man who is resolved upon silence. The doctor did not insist further. There was no way of making himself understood by this son; here again, everything was against him, he reflected, as he caught the warm odor of a young animal.

"I am going to stay here. You won't sit down for a moment, Raymond? A little breathing-spell."

The boy assured him that he preferred to sleep. A few seconds later, the doctor could hear the kick which the youth gave to a pine-cone—and then was alone, under the dense and overhanging foliage—listening to the fervent, melancholy cry which the meadows sent up to the heavens above. To rise required an enormous effort. The electric light was still burning in his study. "Lucie must think that I'm working. How much time I've lost! Here I am, fifty-two—no, fifty-three. What twaddle could that Pa-

pillon . . . ?” He put his hands over a chestnut where he remembered that Raymond and Madeleine had engraved their initials. And suddenly, having embraced it with his arms, he placed his cheek against the cool bark and closed his eyes; then, he straightened up again and, having dusted off his cuffs and stealthily arranged his cravat, walked toward the house.

In the vineyard lane, meanwhile, Raymond was continuing to kick at a pine-cone, his hands crammed into his pockets, as he muttered: “What a gull, all the same! They don’t make them like that any more!” As for himself, ah! he would be ready for whatever came; he was not going to listen to any nonsense. It did not occur to him to expand his happiness to the very limits of this divinely burdensome night. All the stars would have been of no use to him, nor the scent of pale-flowering acacias. The summer night beat in vain upon this young male, well armed, certain of his strength, at this moment, certain of his body, and indifferent to all which that body had not been created to penetrate.

## CHAPTER VII

WORK, the only opium. Each morning, the doctor awoke cured, as though he had been operated on for a gnawing cancer. He would set out alone, since in fair weather Raymond no longer made use of the carriage. Already, in his mind, he was in his laboratory. His passion was no more than a sleeping sickness, of which he preserved a muffled consciousness; it depended on him whether or not it was awakened; by touching the sensitive spot, he was sure of producing a cry of pain. Only yesterday, Robinson had assured him that his favorite hypothesis had been contradicted by a fact, and it looked as though a long and laborious series of experiments might go for nothing. What a triumph for X., who, at a recent meeting of the Biological Society, had exposed his alleged errors in technique.

It is woman's great misery that nothing can turn her mind from the dark and gnawing enemy within. Whereas the doctor, busied at his microscope, no longer knew any-

thing of what was going on inside himself or in the world round about him, being a prisoner of that other world which he was observing, as a dog is held captive by the bird he points, Maria Cross, on the other hand, lying stretched out on her chaise-longue with all the shutters closed, could do nothing but await the one hour that stood out in her life, the brief flame in her dull day. But even that anticipated hour, how much deception it could hold! They had had, very soon, to give up coming home together as far as the Talence church. Maria would go on ahead of Raymond and meet him not far from the school, in a lane of the Parc Bordelais. He gave even less of himself now than he had that first day; and his skittish awkwardness had ended by bringing Maria to the conclusion that he was, indeed, a child, even though, sometimes, a laugh, a hint, a sly glance might have put her on her guard; but she still clung to her angel. With infinite caution, as though he had been an innocent wild bird, she would come up to him on the tips of her toes, with bated breath. Everything tended to strengthen in her this false conception: those cheeks which blushed over nothing at all; that schoolboy's slang; and, upon that strong young body, something of childhood's lingering haze. She was terrified

by that which did not exist in Raymond, and which she had thought to discover there; she trembled before the candor of that look, and reproached herself for having awakened in it uneasiness and turmoil. She had no means of knowing that, when in her presence, his one desire was to flee, so that he might be able to gloat over her in his thoughts and think of the part he was going to have to play. Should he rent a furnished apartment? Papillon knew an address; but it was not good enough for a woman like this. Papillon had told him that at the Terminus one could rent a room by the day; Raymond might have had to put up with that, but he had passed and repassed the hotel office without getting up the nerve to go in. He could foresee other difficulties of a physical nature, made mountains . . .

Maria Cross also was thinking, without daring to say anything to him about it, of luring him to her home. But this barbaric child, this wild bird of hers, she forbade herself to sully, even in thought, being content with assuring herself that, in an overstuffed livingroom at the other end of a drowsy garden, their love would at last flow out into words and the storm-cloud burst into rain. She did not permit herself to picture anything, except, perhaps, the

weight of that head against her. He would be a carefully tamed fawn, whose warm muzzle she would fondle. She foresaw a long, long path of caresses, but did not care to know any except those that were chaste and natural; she forbade herself even to think of any more ardent stages—of that forest where, at last, it was more than likely that their two bodies would have to part the boughs, in order that they might be able to lose themselves in it. . . . No, no, they would not go so far as all that; she would not destroy in this child the very thing that overwhelmed her with fear and adoration. How give him to understand, without startling him, that he might come that week to the overstuffed livingroom, that he must take advantage of the fact that M. Larousselle was on one of his Belgian trips? . . . But Raymond would suspect her of an immodest subterfuge. She did not know that this same Raymond enjoyed her all the more when she was not there, that he carried her with him everywhere, and that he was in the habit of picking her up and putting her down again, like a greedy pup.

\* \* \*

The doctor, at the table, was observing Raymond this evening, as the latter lapped up his soup. It was not his son

he saw, but the man who had said of Maria Cross: "I know what I know. . . ." What could that Papillon have said? Good Lord, how could there be any doubt that some stranger had won Maria? "I am determined to wait for a letter; it is only too clear that she doesn't care to see me again. And that's a sign that she's given herself—to whom?" No way in which he could approach his son a second time; to insist that the lad speak out would be to betray himself. . . . Raymond, at this moment, rose and went out the door, without so much as noticing his mother's "Where are you going?"

"He goes to Bordeaux almost every evening now," Madame Courrèges went on; "I happen to know that he asks the gardener for the key to the gate, and that he comes home at two o'clock in the morning and climbs in through a window. If you could hear how he answers me when I speak to him. . . . If you would only take a hand; but you are so weak!"

The doctor barely had the strength to stammer:

"The wisest course is to shut our eyes."

He could hear Basque's voice: "If he were a son of mine, I'd straighten him out for you. . . ." It was the doctor's turn to rise now; and he went out into the garden.

Had he dared, he would have cried out: "Nothing exists for me now but my torment." We never stop to think that it is, in most cases, the passions of fathers which part them from their sons.

He came back and sat down in front of his work-table, opened a drawer, took out a bundle of letters and began re-reading those which Maria had written him six months ago: "*Nothing any longer binds me to this life except the desire to become a better woman. . . . Secrecy means very little to me now, or the fact that the world continues to point a finger at me; I accept its approbrium. . . .*" The doctor forgot how this display of virtue had driven him to despair, at the time; how it had been his martyrdom to have their relations thus rooted in the sublime, and finally, how it had enraged him to have to save one with whom it would have been so sweet to be lost. He pictured Raymond's derision upon reading this letter, grew indignant over it, and raised his voice to protest, as though he had not been alone: "So she 'has dash', has she? 'Dash'? It is her own expression, for she is always a bit bookish . . . but at the bedside of her little François, when he lay dying, was there any 'dash' in that very humble sorrow of hers, that will to suffer, as though, through all the Kantian pre-

cepts hashed up by her mother, the whole of that old mystic heritage had come down to her intact? As she knelt at that little lily-strewn bier (what an atmosphere of solitude and reprobation!), she reproached herself, she beat her bosom, and groaned out that all was well as it was, congratulating herself on the fact that the child had not lived long enough to be ashamed of her. . . ." At this point, the man of science stepped in: "The truth is, she was sincere; but, nevertheless, a certain self-gratification was mingled with her grandiloquence—yes, she was gratifying her fondness for striking an attitude." Maria Cross always had sought out romantic situations; had she not taken it into her head to have a death-bed interview with Madame Larousselle? The doctor had had his hands full in bringing her to understand that meetings of that sort take place only on the stage. Nothing would do, however, but he must promise to plead the mistress' cause with the wife; and he had been able to bring back to Maria the assurance that she had been forgiven.

The doctor, having gone over to the window and leaned out into the semi-darkness, was now busying his

mind with analyzing the sounds of the night: an incessant chirping of crickets and grasshoppers; a croaking pond; a pair of toads; the broken notes of a bird which may not have been a nightingale; the last tramcar. "I know what I know," Raymond had said. Who could have found favor with Maria Cross? The doctor uttered a number of names and rejected them all; she had a horror of fellows like that. But of whom did she not have a horror? "Remember what Larousselle told you in confidence, the day he came to have his blood-pressure taken: 'Between ourselves, she doesn't care for that sort of thing—you understand what I mean, eh? She stands for it in my case, well, just because it's me. . . . It was an eye-opener, the first time I had some of those chaps in for dinner. They all flocked around, of course, and I sat back and waited; when a friend introduces us to his mistress, the first thing we think of is cutting him out, isn't it? I said to myself: Go on, you old codgers. . . . But it didn't last long; they soon found they had to toe the mark. There is no one who knows less about love than Maria, or who takes less pleasure in it than she; I am telling you what I know. She's an innocent little girl, Doctor! A good deal more innocent than most of those fine and respectable ladies who look

down upon her.'” Larousselle also had told him: “It is because Maria is not like any other woman that I am always afraid she will take some silly notion into her head, some time when I am away; she does nothing but mope all day long, never goes out except to the cemetery. . . . Don’t you think she may be under the influence of some silly old book or other?”

“Yes, perhaps a ‘silly old book,’” the doctor now reflected, “but I should know of it, if that were the case, for that was my business. A book occasionally upsets a man’s life—and again! that’s talk—but a woman’s? Go on! We are never deeply disturbed except by something that is alive—something of flesh and blood. A book?” He shook his head. *Bouquin* evoked in his mind the word *bouquetin*, and he saw rising at Maria Cross’ side a young wild goat.

Outside, in the grass, cats were wailing. A footstep crunched in the gravel of the walk, and a window was opened: Raymond coming home, no doubt. Then, the doctor heard steps in the corridor, and there was a knock at his door; it was Madeleine.

“Daddy, you’re not asleep yet? It’s about Catherine; she

has a hoarse cough . . . came on her suddenly. . . . I'm afraid of the croup."

"No, the croup doesn't start like that. I'll be there in a moment."

A short while later, coming out of his daughter's room, he felt a pain in his left side, and stood there motionless, against the wall, in the darkness; he did not call out. Being in full possession of his faculties, he could not help hearing a dialogue which was taking place between the Basques, on the other side of the door:

"Of course, he's a great scientist, that goes without saying; but his science has made a sceptic of him; he doesn't believe in medicine any more, and how are you going to cure without medicine?"

"But he assures us that it's nothing, not even the mock-croup."

"Don't worry, if it had been one of his patients, he would have prescribed something, just the same. With his own family, he doesn't put himself out; he doesn't go to any expense. It's stupid, sometimes, not to be able to call in some one else."

"Yes, but it's very nice, having him always there when you want him, during the night. When the poor fellow's

gone, I shan't be able to sleep in peace on account of the little ones."

"You ought to have married a doctor!"

A laugh smothered in a kiss. The doctor's hand unclosed over his heart, and he softly stole away. He lay down, was not able to endure a reclining position, and so, remained sitting up in his bed in the dark. Everything was asleep, save for that swish of leaves. . . . "Did Maria ever know love? I recall certain infatuations . . . for example, with little Gaby Dubois, whom she tried to get to break with Dupont-Gunther. . . . But that, again, was a passion that had in it something of the sublime. . . . One of her ancestors must have been a missionary; and it must have been from him that she inherited her zeal for saving souls. And who was it, by the way, was telling me that Gaby had been circulating terrible tales about Maria? . . . Can it be that she is 'one of those'? I remember other infatuations of hers. . . . There may be something of that in her case. . . . I have noticed that those who are a little too ecstatic . . . Daylight already!"

He tossed back his pillow, and cautiously stretching himself out in such a manner that his physical mechanism would not suffer, he lost consciousness.

## CHAPTER VIII

“WHAT am I to tell the gardener?”

In a deserted walk of the Parc Bordelais, Maria Cross was endeavoring to persuade Raymond to come to her house, where he ran no risk, now, of meeting any one. She insisted, and was ashamed of her insistence, feeling that she was a seducer in spite of herself. That childish phobia in passing and repassing a shop without daring to go in—what was she to see in that, if not the manifestation of an innocent fear? And that is why it was that she now protested:

“Above all, Raymond, don’t think that I mean . . . don’t fancy . . .”

“It’s stupid, having to pass the gardener.”

“But I am telling you that there is no gardener. I live on a vacant place, one which M. Larousselle was not able to rent; and so, he established me there as overseer.”

Raymond burst out laughing:

“So, you’re the gardener, eh!”

The young woman drooped her shoulders, and searched his face as she stammered:

"Appearances are all against me, I know. I have no way of convincing people that I accepted the position in good faith. François had to have the country air. . . ."

Raymond was familiar with the refrain, and remarked to himself "All talk."

"So," he interrupted her, "you say there is no gardener . . . but the servants?"

She reassured him. On Sunday, she would give Justine, the only maid she had, an afternoon off. Justine was married to a chauffeur, who came to sleep there at night, so that there might be a man on the place; the house was not a secure one, and the suburbs were none too safe at night; but Sunday afternoons, Justine went out with her husband. All Raymond had to do was to come in; he would go through the diningroom at the left; the livingroom was on the other side.

He was engaged in hollowing out the sand with his heel, with an air of absorption. Behind the privets, the creaking of swings could be heard. A huckster was offering them an assortment of dust-covered rolls and chocolate bars done up in yellow paper. Raymond, remarking that he

had not had any lunch, bought a crescent and a burnt-almond confection. At that moment, in the presence of this lad gulping down his schoolboy's lunch, Maria recognized her inexorable fate. She felt no agitation, ever, as her desires sprang up; yet, all her actions wore a monstrous aspect. When, in the tramway, she had first begun resting her eyes upon that face, there had been no lurking in her thoughts; why, indeed, should she have resisted a mere sentimental impulse in which there was so little to suspect? One, moreover, who is thirsty does not pause to question a spring that he finds in his path. "Yes, I do want to have him come to my house, but only because, in the street or on a bench in a public park, I should never be able to break through his reserve. . . . And yet, say what you will, here is a woman of twenty-seven luring to her home a mere youth—the son of the only man who ever showed any confidence in her, the only one who refrained from casting a stone. . . ." And after they had parted, shortly before they came to the Croix de Saint-Genès, she went on thinking: "I want him to come, but not for any evil purpose, no, not for any evil purpose; the very thought of anything of that sort nauseates me. All this does not keep him from being suspicious; and why should he not be suspicious?"

All my actions seem innocent enough as I look at them, but they are abominable in the eyes of the world. Yet, it may be the world that sees truly. . . ." She uttered one name, then another. . . . If she was looked down upon for those actions in which her will-power had been taken un-awares, she could remember others, shrouded in secrecy, of which she alone knew. . . .

She pushed open the gate which Raymond would be opening for the first time next Sunday, and went up the grass-grown drive (there *was* no gardener). The skies were so heavy, it seemed incredible that great cloud should not burst—as though the heavens themselves ought to be moved by the universal thirst. The leaves on the trees were withered from lack of moisture. The maid had not closed the shutters, and huge flies were knocking about. Maria barely had the strength to toss her hat upon the piano; she took no notice of the fact that her walking-slippers were soiling the chaise-longue; the only gesture she found possible was the lighting of a cigarette. Ah! she had that to contend with, also: this physical flabbiness, to offset as feverish an imagination as ever was. How many after-noon had she frittered away here, literally sick at heart from having smoked so much! How many plans for es-

cape, for self-purification, had been erected only to be demolished! To carry them out, she would have had to rise, to take a few steps, to see some one. . . . "But if I give up all thought of mending my outward life, I still can refuse to permit myself anything of which my conscience does not approve, anything that would trouble it. And so, with this young Courrèges . . ." It was understood, she was not luring him to her home from any other motive than the mild pleasure she already had come to know on the six o'clock tram: the comfort to be derived from a certain individual's presence, the simple, melancholy pleasure of contemplation—but here to be enjoyed at closer range than in the tram, and more at leisure. Nothing but that? Nothing but that? When the presence of some one deeply moves us, we subconsciously thrill at the thought of possible projections, and certain unbounded perspectives come to disturb our view. "I should soon have grown tired of looking at him, had I not known that he would respond to my manoeuverings, and that, one day, we would speak to each other. . . . I am not imagining anything as taking place between us in this room, beyond an exchange of confidences, maternal caresses, calm kisses;—but have the courage to admit that you do foresee, beyond that innocent

pleasure, a whole forbidden realm and, at the same time, one with no barriers up; no frontier to cross; a free field in which, gradually, to settle down; a cloud of darkness in which to lose one's self, as out of pure inadvertence. . . . And after that? Who is forbidding us to be happy? Am I not capable of making this boy happy? . . . There is where you begin to deceive yourself; he is Dr. Courrèges' child, the son of that saintly physician . . . he would never stand for the question's being raised, not he! Did you not laughingly tell him, one day, that the moral law within him was one that shone as brightly as the starry heavens above his head . . . ?"

Maria heard drops on the leaves, a rumbling of the wavering storm; and closing her eyes and collecting her thoughts, she concentrated upon the cherished countenance of that child, that child who was so innocent (whom she wanted to believe so innocent), and who, yet, at that very moment, was hastening to escape the downpour and thinking to himself: "Papillon says it is better to rush things; he says, 'with women like that, there's nothing like treating 'em rough; that's the only thing that gets 'em.'" The lad glanced up in perplexity at the muttering sky, and then, suddenly began running, his cape thrown over his head;

taking the shortest cut, he leaped a hedge, with as much agility as a wild goat.

The storm appeared to be dying away, but it had not stopped as yet, and the calm in itself was ominous. And then it was that Maria Cross felt the birth of an inspiration, one which, she was sure, she had no cause to suspect. She arose, sat down at her writing-table and wrote: "*Do not come Sunday, whatever you do, neither Sunday nor any other day. It is for your sake alone that I am willing to make this sacrifice. . . .*" Here, she should have signed her name; but a fiend whispered to her to add another page:

*"You would have been the one joy in a hopeless and unbearable life. In the course of our return-trips last winter, I found a rest in you that you knew nothing of; but that countenance you gave me was but the mirror of a soul which I wished to possess. There was nothing about you that I did not want to know; I wanted to be able to answer your questionings, to part the thorny branches in front of you, to become for you something more than a mother, something better than a friend. . . . That was my dream . . . but it is not for me to make of myself another .*

*being. . . . You would breathe in here, in spite of yourself, in spite of me, that polluted atmosphere in which the world smothers me. . . ."*

She wrote on, and on. The rain had set in, and no sound was to be heard save its splashing. The windows were all closed, but hail-stones rattled in the chimney. Maria picked up a book, but it was too dark to read; on account of the storm, the lamps had not been lighted. So, she sat down at her piano and, leaning forward, began playing; but her head was thrown back, as though held there by his hands.

\* \* \*

The next day, Friday, Maria felt a vague exultation in observing how the storm had jumbled the weather; and she spent, in her dressing-gown, a day of reading, music and idleness, as she strove to recall each phrase of 'her letter and to imagine what young Courrèges' reactions would be. On Saturday, following a sluggish morning, the rain began falling again; and Maria knew, then, what the source of her pleasurable feeling had been: the bad weather would be one reason for not going out Sunday, as she at

first had intended to do—if young Courrèges kept the appointment in spite of her letter, she would be there. Turning a step away from the window, where she had been watching the rain-drops spattering on the walk, she voiced with conviction what sounded like a solemn promise: “No matter what the weather is, I shall go out.”

Where was she to go? Had François been alive, she would have taken him with her to the circus. . . . She used occasionally to go to a concert, where she was the sole occupant of a box, a corner one by preference; but it never took the audience long to become aware of her presence; she could make out her own name on the moving lips in front of her, while opera-glasses left her a baited and defenseless prey to that world which was her enemy. She could hear a voice: “There’s no getting around it; women like that know how to dress.” —“That’s not so hard, when you have the money.” —“And then, all that women like that have to think about is their bodies.” Sometimes, a friend of M. Larousselle’s would leave his box in the dress-circle and come over to greet her. Turning so that he was half-facing the house, he would laugh in a loud voice, proud of being seen speaking to Maria Cross in public.

But with the exception of the St. Cecelia concert, she

had not gone anywhere, even while François lived, since the time some women had insulted her at the music-hall. The mistresses of those other chaps hated her, for the reason that she had never been willing to put up with their company. One of them alone had found favor in her eyes for a few days—that Gaby Dubois, who had impressed her as being a “nice soul,” from a few words they had exchanged one evening at the *Lion Rouge*, where Larousselle had dragged Maria. The champagne had had a good deal to do with Gaby’s witty effervescence. The two young women had seen each other, after that, every day for two weeks. Maria, with a patient fury, had vainly endeavored to break the bonds which held her friend to others. At an *Apollo* matinée, shortly after their falling out, she had found herself stranded in a sea of boredom; being alone, as always, she had attracted the attention of the entire house; and she had heard, from a row of orchestra-seats adjoining her box, Gaby’s gushing, high-pitched laugh, mingled with those of others, and she had caught fragments of half-audible insults: “That trollop, who plays at being an empress . . . that one . . . with her virtuous airs. . . .” Maria could no longer distinguish a single profile in that audience: all she could see was a blur of beastly

faces bent upon her. The lights had gone out at last, and with all eyes riveted upon a nude dancer, she had been able to make her escape.

After that, she had not cared to go out without little François; and for a year now, since he had been gone, he had been the only one able to entice her: that stone no bigger than a child's body, even though, in order to find it, one had to take the cemetery path that bore the sign "Adults." But on the way to and from her dead child, she had had to meet this child in the flesh.

\* \* \*

Sunday morning, a high wind was blowing—not one of those which do no more than rock the heights, but one of those mighty squalls from the South and off the sea which, coming up with an enormous force, bring with them in their wake a whole stretch of darkling sky. A solitary tom-tit made Maria conscious of the silence of a thousand birds. It was too bad, but she would not be able to go out. Young Courrèges must have received her letter; she knew well enough how timid he was, and was sure that he would obey her. Had she not written, he might, doubtless, have

got up the courage to come. She smiled, as she mentally saw him standing there, hollowing out with his heel the sand of the walk, repeating in a stubborn voice: "And the gardener?" As she ate her breakfast in solitude, she listened to the approach of the storm. The horses of the wind, their work done, were now cantering madly about and snorting through the branches. Upon the river, they undoubtedly had brought up, from the depths of a sundered Atlantic, any number of those canny sea-mews and gulls that are lighter than air. Over the suburb, one might have said that their breath was giving to the clouds the livid hue of sea-wrack, and that, down below, they were splashing the leaves with a briny foam. Leaning out into the garden, Maria felt the taste of salt upon her lips. He would not come; even if she had not written, how could he have gone out in weather like this? She should have been distressed over his not coming. Ah! it was better, this assurance, this certainty that he would not come. And yet, if there was nothing that resembled expectation on her part, why open the diningroom buffet to make sure there was some port left? The rain broke at last, dense and sun-shot. Maria opened a book, read without comprehension, and patiently but vainly began the page over again. She sat down at the

piano, but her playing was not so loud that she could not hear the front door. She had time to tell herself, in order that she might not feel faint: "It's the wind; it must be the wind," and she kept repeating: "It's the wind," despite the sound of hesitant footsteps in the diningroom. She did not have the strength to rise; and before she knew it, he was standing there, embarrassed, his dripping hat in his hand. He lacked the courage to make a move, and she had not the courage to summon him, being deafened by the tumult within her, a passion that was breaking its dikes and rushing out to take a frenzied revenge, an invasion that was complete in a moment's time, filling body and soul to the brim, submerging at once peaks and shallows. Nevertheless, she contrived to voice an ordinary-sounding reproof:

"You didn't get my letter, then?"

He stood there, forbidden. ("She'll try to make you walk chalk," Papillon had told him; "don't let her out-manoeuvre you; just saunter in with your hands in your pockets. . . .") Before that face which he believed to be full of anger, Raymond dropped his head like a punished child. And Maria, trembling all over, as though she had succeeded in imprisoning a wild fawn between the four walls of this overstuffed livingroom of hers, did not dare make a single

gesture. She had done the impossible to keep him away, but he had come. No regrets now poisoned her happiness; she felt that she could give herself to it fully and freely. To the fates, who had insisted upon flinging her this child for her grazing-ground, she swore that she would be worthy of their gift. What had she feared? There was nothing in her, at this moment, but the noblest form of love; the proof lay in those tears which she pressed back as she thought of François: the latter would have been a big boy like this one, in a few years. . . . She was unaware that the face she made to restrain her tears was being interpreted by Raymond as a sign of amusement, if not of anger.

"After all," she said, "why not? You did right in coming. Put your hat on a chair. It makes no difference if it is wet; that Genoan velvet has seen plenty of others. . . . A little port? Yes? No? It's yes."

As he was drinking it off, she continued:

"Why did I write that letter? I don't know myself. . . . Women have their whims . . . and anyway, I knew that you would come, just the same."

Raymond dried his lips with the back of his hand.

"But I came near not coming. I said to myself, she'll be out, and I'd look like a fool."

"I don't go out since I've been in mourning. . . . I never spoke to you before of my little François, did I?"

François came in, on the tips of his toes, as though he had been a living being. And it may be that his mother would have liked to detain him, by way of breaking off a tête-à-tête that held its perils. Raymond saw here only a pretense to keep him at a proper distance; but Maria, on the contrary, was thinking only of reassuring him and, far from being afraid of him, believed herself to be fear-inspiring. Moreover, this intrusion of the dead child was something to which she had not, of her own volition, had resort; the little lad had inflicted himself upon them like children who hear their mother's voice in the parlor and come running in without knocking. The child's being there was a sign that there was nothing in all this that was not wholly innocent. What are you worrying about, poor dear? Little François is standing by your chair; he is smiling up at you, and he does not blush.

"It must be more than a year now since he died, isn't it? I remember the day of the funeral very well. . . . Mother threw a scene with father. . . ."

He stopped short; he would have liked to take back the words he had just spoken.

"Why a scene? Ah! Yes, I understand. . . . Even on that day, they had no mercy. . . ."

Having risen, Maria took an album and placed it on Raymond's knees:

"I should like to show you some photographs of him. Your father is the only one who has seen them. Here he is one month old, in my husband's arms; at that age, they don't look like anything at all, except to their mothers. Look at him here, at the age of two, laughing and with a balloon in his arms. There, see, we were at Salies; he was already beginning to lose strength; I had to draw on my slender capital to pay expenses that season; but there was a doctor there who was so kind, so charitable . . . his name was Casamajor. . . . He it was who first took the bull by the horns. . . ."

As she leaned over Raymond to turn the pages, she quite frankly took advantage of this flame, warmed herself at this brazier, fanned it with her breath. She could not see the lad's furious face; his knees weighted down with the album, he was unable to budge, but he was gasping and shivering with repressed rage.

"There he is at six and a half, two months before he died. He had recovered quite nicely, don't you think? I

have always asked myself if I did not give him too much work to do. Your father assures me that I did not. At six, he was reading everything that came his way, whether he understood it or not. From living all the time with a grown person. . . .”

She was saying: “He was my comrade, my friend. . . .,” for she was quite unable to distinguish, at this moment, what François really had been to her from what she had hoped of him.

“He asked me so many questions. How many anguished nights I spent, thinking that one day I should have to explain to him. . . . And if there is one thought that makes it possible for me to go on living today, it is that he is gone without knowing—that he never did, never will know.”

She had straightened up, and her arms had dropped to her sides. Raymond did not dare lift his eyes, but he could hear the sobs that shook her. Although very much moved, he had his doubts concerning this sorrow of hers, and a little later, on the road home, felt compelled to say to himself: “She falls for her own game . . . a game that she plays even with the dead. . . . And yet, her tears . . . ?” The idea he had of her had been jostled; for the youth had formed for himself a theological conception of “bad

women," conformable to the one which his masters at school had given him, even though he believed himself to be so well protected against their influence. Maria Cross had him surrounded, like an army drawn up in battle-array; the rings of Judith and Delilah tinkled at her ankles; and there was no sham, no treachery of which he would not have believed her to be capable, whose very glance the saints had feared, even as they had feared death itself.

Maria had said to him: "Come back whenever you like; I am always home."

Calm but tearful, she had followed him all the way to the door, without even making another appointment with him. After he had gone, she sat down near François' bed; she carried her grief there like a child that had fallen asleep in her arms. She experienced a peace which may have been the peace of deception. What she did not know was that she was not always to be succored; no, the dead do not succor the living, and it is in vain that we invoke them on the edge of the abyss; their silence, their absence then are in the nature of a conspiracy.

## CHAPTER IX

IT would have been better for Maria Cross if this first visit of Raymond's had not left her with a feeling of the safety and innocence of the whole affair. She marveled that everything should have gone off so smoothly. "I was worked up over nothing," she thought. She had what she believed to be a sense of relief, but began to regret having let Raymond go without making an appointment. She was never out at a time when he might have come. But that sorry game the passions play is so simple a one that a mere youth possesses the key to it in his first intrigue; Raymond had no need of any one's advising him to "let her stew."

After four days of waiting, she had begun to reproach herself: "I talked to him about nothing except myself and François; I gave him the blues—what interest could he have in that album? I should have asked him questions about himself, his life, to give him confidence. . . . He was bored; he takes me for an old stick . . . and supposing he doesn't come back?"

Supposing he did not come back! This uneasiness of hers would very speedily turn to anguish: "Of course! I can wait! But he's not coming any more. . . . He's not to be snared a second time. . . . At that age, we never forgive those who bore us. . . . Oh, well! that's that; another affair come to nothing." The evidence in the case was blinding, terrible! He would never come back. Maria Cross was filling up the last well in her desert. Nothing left but sand. What is more dangerous in a love-affair than the flight of one of the parties? Presence is, more likely than not, an obstacle. When Raymond Courrèges was there, the first thing Maria saw was a youth whose heart it would be a vile thing to snare; she remembered who his father was; and the lingering traces of childhood upon his face recalled her own lost infancy. As a result, she did not draw near that young body, even in thought, save with a certain ardent modesty. But now that he was no longer there, and she doubted whether she would ever see him again, what was the use of suspecting that turbid wave, that dark eddy within? If the fruit was not to be had for her thirst, why deprive herself of the pleasure of imagining what it tasted like? Whom was she wronging? What reproach was she to look for from that stone where the name of François was

engraved? Who was to see her in this husbandless, childless, servantless house? Madame Courrèges' paltry talk of kitchen quarrels—it would have been well if Maria Cross could have had something of the sort with which to busy her mind! Where was she to go? On the other side of the sleepy garden lay the suburb, then the rock-ribbed town where, whenever a storm breaks, one was assured of nine stifling days. In that livid sky, a ferocious beast drowsed, prowled, snarled and crouched. Wandering up and down the garden, or through the empty rooms of the house, Maria little by little yielded—and what other outlet was there for her misery?—to the allurements of a hopeless love, which left her with the wretched pleasure of feeling that she was herself at last. She no longer fought against the conflagration, no longer suffered from her forlorn lack of occupation; her inner furnace kept her busy, as a dark fiend whispered to her: “You may be dying, but you are not being bored to death.”

The strange thing about a storm is not its tumult, but that numbing silence which it imposes upon the world. Maria could see the leaves hanging motionless against the window-panes, as though they had been painted there. There was something human in the languor of the trees;

one would have said that they knew torpor, stupor and sleep. Maria had reached the point where passion becomes a presence. She irritated her wound, and went on feeding the fire that was consuming her, until her love became a stifling thing, a physical contraction, which she could localize in her throat, her bosom. A letter from M. Larousselle made her shudder with disgust. Ah! she would never be able to stand him near her from now on. A fortnight before he returned . . . time to die. She was pasturing her mind on Raymond, and on certain memories which once would have overwhelmed her with shame: "I used to gaze at his leather hat-band, at the place where it touched his forehead. . . . I looked for the odor of his hair. . . ." What a fondness she had for his face, his neck, his hands, the sole manifestations of a hidden and altogether delightful reality. . . . Oh, the inconceivable repose that lay in despair! Occasionally, the idea would occur to her that he was still alive, that nothing had been lost, that he would, perhaps, come. But as though the hope itself dismayed her, she would hastily seek refuge in a total renunciation, the peace of one who no longer waits for anything. With a frightful joy, she went on widening the chasm between herself and the one whom she still stubbornly believed to be pure: as far from her love as the

hunter, Orion, shone that unattainable lad. "Look at me, a woman already used up, gone to the dogs, while he is suffused with the innocence of childhood; his purity is a heaven between us, in which my desire of its own accord gives up all thought of blazing a path." Every day, the winds from the west and south came dragging after them dark cloud-masses, rumbling legions which, on the verge of disbanding, would suddenly hesitate, whirl around in fascinating spiral-formations, and then disappear, leaving behind them that refreshing coolness which follows a slight fall of rain.

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From Friday night to Saturday, the rain never ceased its rustling fall. Thanks to chloral, Maria was resting peacefully, as the garden sent its odoriferous breath through the curtains and over her disordered bed—and then, she went down.

With the morning sun, she was astonished, as she lay there prostrate, at what she had been through. What madness was this? Why must she always make the worst of everything? The boy was alive; he was only waiting for a

sign. Following this crisis, Maria was once more lucid and self-poised, possibly self-deceived: "Was that all there was to it? But he will come; and just to make sure, I will write to him—I will see him." Whatever happened, she must confront her pain with the cause of her pain. She fixed in her mind the memory of a simple, inoffensive lad, and was surprised to find that she did not tremble now at the thought of that head upon her knees. "I will write to the doctor that I have made his son's acquaintance" (she knew that she would do nothing of the sort). "Why not? What is there out of the way between us?" In the afternoon, she went out into the puddle-filled garden once more; she was really calm, too calm, so calm that she was almost afraid: to be less conscious of her passion was to be more conscious of her nothingness; abated, her love no longer hid for her the void. She was regretting that her stroll about the garden had lasted but five minutes; once again, she went down the same walks, then began to hurry, for the grass was wetting her feet. . . . She would put on her slippers, stretch out, smoke, read . . . then what? Nothing interesting seemed likely to happen. She raised her eyes to the windows and, behind a livingroom pane, caught sight of Raymond.

He had stuck his face to the window and was amusing

himself by flattening out his nose. This tide that surged up in her—was it a tide of joy? As she climbed the steps, she thought of the feet which had just trod them; as she pushed open the door, she thought of the hand which lately had rested upon it. She slackened her pace as she crossed the diningroom, and did her best to compose her countenance.

It was Raymond's ill luck to have come after Maria Cross had been dreaming and suffering so much on his account all these days. She was annoyed, at first sight, by her inability to bridge the gulf between the endless agitation which she had been through and the cause of that agitation. She was not aware of any deception; and yet, deceived she had been, as was evidenced by the first remark she made:

"You've just come from the barber's?"

She had never seen him like this, his hair cut too short and glistening. . . . She touched with her hand a wan scar above his temple.

"I got that in falling from a swing," he said, "when I was eight years old."

She gazed at him intently, making an effort to adjust to her desire, to her pain, to her hunger, to her renunciation, this lad who was, at once, so lean and strong, this overgrown young hound. Of the innumerable feelings that came

surging up in her with regard to him, all that were capable of being salvaged now centered, in one fashion or another, about that strained and reddening face. But she failed to recognize a certain expression of the eyes and brow, the mania of the timid one who has made up his mind to conquer, of the coward bent upon action. Indeed, he never before had impressed her as being so utterly boyish, and she now spoke to him with an air of maternal affection, as she so often had spoken to François:

“Are you thirsty? I will give you some currant-cordial right away; but you must wait until you cool off a bit.”

She pointed to a chair, but he sat down upon the chaise-longue, where she by this time was reclining. He assured her that he was not thirsty:

“At least, not for cordial.”

She pulled her dress down over her legs, which were showing a little; and this drew from him the compliment: “What a pity!” And then, changing her position, she sat down beside the young man, who asked her why she had not remained lying down.

“You’re surely not afraid of me, are you?”

A speech which let Maria Cross see that she was afraid;

but of what? Was this not Raymond Courrèges, the little Courrèges boy, the doctor's son?

"How is your father?"

He lifted his shoulders and stuck out his lower lip. Having offered him a cigarette which he refused, she lighted one for herself, her elbows upon her knees.

"Yes," she said, "you've often told me that you were not on very intimate terms with your father, but that's the way it usually is; parents and children. . . . When François would come to hide his little face in my lap, I used to think: better make the best of it; it won't last forever."

Maria had mistaken the meaning of those lifted shoulders of Raymond's, the pout upon his lips. At that moment, he was wishing he might forget all about his father, not because of any indifference that he felt, but because, on the contrary, the subject had been an obsession with him, ever since the night before last. After dinner that night, the doctor had caught up with Raymond as the latter was taking a solitary smoke in the vineyard lane, and had walked along beside his son in silence for some time, like a man who is holding back his words. "What does he want

of me?" thought Raymond, who was reveling in the cruel pleasure of keeping silent—the same pleasure he had experienced on those early autumnal mornings, in the brougham with the dripping panes. He even, mechanically, quickened his steps, when he perceived that his father had difficulty in keeping up with him, being always a couple of paces behind. But suddenly, when he no longer heard the older man's panting breath, he had turned around. The doctor's dark form was standing there motionless in the middle of the walk, and he was pressing both hands to his bosom and swaying like a drunken man. He took a few steps, and then sat down heavily. Raymond had dropped to his knees, and with that death's head upon his shoulder, had had a near glimpse of a face with the eyes closed and cheeks that were the color of white bread. "What's the matter, Dad? What's the matter, Daddy dear?" That voice, at once imperious and entreating, had awakened the sick man, as though it had been possessed of some miraculous property. Still gasping a little, the doctor managed to smile distractedly: "It's nothing; it's nothing at all. . . ." He did not take his eyes off his son's anguished face, as he listened to the same gentle voice that he had known in Raymond when the latter was eight years old: "Rest your head on me. You

don't happen to have a clean handkerchief, do you? Mine's all dirty." Tenderly, Raymond had dried that face, which now began to show signs of life. When the father opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was a head of boyish hair waving slightly in the breeze, then a thick cluster of vines, and beyond, a rumbling sulphurous-hued sky, where it seemed as though invisible tumbril-carts were being overturned. Leaning upon his son's arm, the doctor had gone back toward the house; the warm rain was beating upon their cheeks and shoulders, but it was impossible to walk any faster. "It's the false angina pectoris," he told Raymond, "which is quite as painful as the real thing. . . . I am merely 'counterfeiting' intoxication; I shall have to stay in bed forty-eight hours on a liquid diet. . . . Be sure not to say a word to your grandmother or your mother. . . ." And when Raymond had interrupted him with "You're sure you're not deceiving me? You're sure it's nothing? Give me your word that it's nothing at all," the doctor had asked him, in a low voice: "Would it pain you, if . . ."; but Raymond had not permitted him to finish; he had slipped an arm around that gasping body, and a cry had escaped him: "How silly you are!" The doctor was later to recall this cherished bit of insolence, in those dark hours when this

child of his had become a stranger and an enemy, with deaf and unanswering heart. They entered the drawing-room together, without the father's daring to embrace his son.

"Suppose we talk about something else? I didn't come here to talk about Dad, you know! We can find something better to do than that . . . can't we?"

Raymond put out a big awkward paw, which she seized in mid-air and gently held off.

"No, Raymond, no; you don't understand him for the reason that you are too close to him. Our nearest of kin are always those that we know the least about . . . until we even fail to see our surroundings at all, any more. Take my own case. In my family, they always thought I was ugly, because as a child I had squinted a little; but in high-school, to my great astonishment, my class-mates told me that I was pretty."

"That's right; go ahead; tell me some girls'-school stories."

The one fixed idea he harbored gave his face an old look. Maria did not dare let go that big hand, which was

now becoming moist. She experienced a little disgust at this; this was the hand the mere touch of which, ten minutes ago, had caused her to turn pale. This hand, held for an instant, had, but lately, caused her to shut her eyes and turn away her head. And now, it was a damp, clammy hand.

"Yes! I am determined to bring you to know the doctor; I am stubborn about it, you see!"

He broke in to assure her that he was stubborn, too:

"And look here: I swore that today, I wasn't going to be out-manoeuvred."

He stammered it out in a voice so low that she could pretend she had not heard. But she increased the distance between them, then rose and opened a window.

"You would think it hadn't rained a drop; it's stifling. But I can still hear the storm—unless it's only the Saint-Medard gun."

Up above the leaves, she showed him the tortured head of a deep, dark, sun-fringed cloud. But he seized her fore-arms in both his hands and pushed her over toward the chaise-longue. She forced herself to laugh: "Let me go!"—and the more she struggled, the harder she laughed, in order to make out that this was nothing more than a game

and that she understood it as such. "Bad boy that you are, let me go. . . ." Her laugh had turned to a grin. Having stumbled over the divan, she had a view of numberless drops of sweat upon a sordid brow and a pair of nostrils set off with black dots, and she breathed in the odor of an acrid breath. This fawn of hers was bent upon retaining the young woman's two fists in one hand, in order that the other hand might be busy; when Maria, with a quick jerk, freed herself. Between them now were the chaise-longue, a table and a chair. She was panting a little, but still contrived to force a laugh:

"So you think, my lad, that one takes a woman by force?"

He did not laugh; he was a young and humiliated male, furious over his defeat, touched to the quick in that precocious and inordinate physical pride of his—a bleeding pride, now. All his life long, he was to remember that moment when a woman had looked upon him not merely as repellent (which would have been nothing), but as grotesque. And all his future victories, all his victims overcome and left miserable, were never to be able to soothe the scalding sting of that first humiliation. For a long time, at the very thought of it, he would bite his lips until they bled; and at night, he would bite into his pillow. Raymond Courrèges

was now restraining tears of rage, being utterly unable to conceive that Maria's smile could be a sham, that she was not seeking to inflict a hurt on an unmanageable child, but that, on the other hand, she was anxious not to betray that inner disaster, that downfall which was taking place within herself. Oh! if he would only go away! If only she could be left alone!

But a short while back, Raymond had been astonished to find the notorious Maria Cross within his reach; he had said to himself: "This simple little woman is Maria Cross." All he had to do was to put out his hand; and there she was, submissive, inert; he could pick her up, drop her, pick her up again—and then, all of a sudden, a single gesture of his arms had been enough to put this same Maria Cross at a dizzying distance from him. Ah! she was still there; but he knew with a certain knowledge that, from now on, he would never touch her, any more than he would touch a star. Then it was, he saw that she was beautiful. Wholly occupied, up to then, with his thoughts of plucking and eating the fruit, without for a moment doubting that the fruit was to be his, he never really had looked at her. She is yours, now, to devour with your eyes.

She was saying, gently, from fear of irritating him, but

with a terrifying show of will: "I need to be alone, Raymond, do you understand? You must leave me alone. . . ." The doctor had been pained by the fact that Maria did not care for his presence; but Raymond, for his part, was to know a worse pain: the necessity of blinding one's eyes to the fact that the person one loves is through dissimulating, through with hiding, and is now casting us out, vomiting us forth. Our absence is now necessary to that other's life, who burns with the desire to hurl us into oblivion: "Hurry up and get out of my life. . . ." That person is not upset; fears only our resistance. Maria Cross handed Raymond his hat, pushed open the door and stood back to let him pass. He, overwhelmed with shame and stammering out silly excuses, had only one wish: to disappear. But the lad was scarcely in the road, the door barely had closed behind him, when he found the words which he should have hurled in that whore's face. . . . Too late! And for years, the thought was to torture him "that he had left without giving her what was coming to her."

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While Raymond, in the highway, was unburdening his heart of all those insults which he had not had a chance

to heap upon Maria Cross, that young woman, having closed first the door and then the window, had thrown herself upon the chaise-longue. Through the trees, some bird or other occasionally flung out a broken call, which was like the confused speech of one who is asleep. The suburb was noisy with the sound of tramways and siren-whistles, and the drunken songs of a Saturday were to be heard in all the roads. Yet Maria Cross was being smothered by silence—a silence that was not extraneous to her, but which, mounting upward from the depths of her being, accumulated in the deserted room, and then invaded the house, the garden, the town, the world. And at the center of this stifling silence, she went on living, as she watched that flame which had suddenly been deprived of all fuel, but which, none the less, was inextinguishable. What was it fed this fire? She remembered how, some times, at the end of her lonely evenings, a final gleam would spurt forth from amid the black rubbish in the fireplace, where she had thought all was extinguished. She sought the adorable face of that child in the six o'clock tram, and was not able to find it. Nothing remained but a young cad, up in arms, crazed with timidity and goading himself on—a picture as different from the real Raymond Courrèges as was that

other embellished image of their love. Toward the one whom she had transfigured, apotheosized, she was now stubbornly resentful: "So, it was on account of that filthy urchin that I was, in turn, so wretched and so happy. . . ." She did not know that, as a result of her having looked upon this unformed child, the latter was to grow up into a man whose wiles many other women would come to know, whose caresses they would endure, whose blows they would receive. If she had brought him into being through her love, she had put the finishing touch to her work by thus spurning him; she had let loose in the world an overgrown boy, whose mania it was to be to prove that he was irresistible, even though one Maria Cross might have held out against him. A veiled enmity was to creep into all his intrigues from now on, a passion for inflicting wounds, for causing his victim to cry for mercy. It would be Maria Cross' tears which, all his life long, he was to cause to flow down other women's cheeks. He had, no doubt, been born with this hunter's instinct; but there is also no doubt that, without Maria, that instinct would have been softened by a relenting touch of weakness.

"For that cad. . . ." How disgusting! Yet the inextinguishable flame, with no fuel to feed upon, was still burn-

ing within her; and no person in the world was to have the benefit of its light, its heat. Where was she to turn? To La Chartreuse, where François' body was? No, no, admit that all you were looking for there was an alibi. She had never been so faithful in visiting her child in the cemetery as during those return-trips, which she had so enjoyed, at the side of another, living child. Hypocrite! Nothing to do; no speech to utter at a tomb; whichever way she turned, she knocked her head, as against a door that had no lock—shut in for all eternity. Fall to her knees in the dust of the street. . . . Little François, handful'of ashes, you who were so full of laughter and of tears. . . . Whom did she wish, now, for company? The doctor?—that old stick? No, not an old stick. . . . But what was the use of striving for perfection, when it is our fate never to be able to make an effort that is not, in spite of our best intentions, equivocal in character? No matter what the ends Maria prided herself upon attaining, the worst part of herself always found in them something by which to profit.

There was no person whose presence she desired, nor was there any place in the world where she would have wished to be other than in this livingroom with the curtains full of holes. What about Saint-Clair? Her childhood at Saint-

Clair. . . . She remembered the park where she used to slip away, after that clerical household which was so unfriendly to her mother had departed. It seemed that Nature had been waiting for that departure, following the Easter vacation, to undo her bag of leaves. The ferns were shooting up, thickening their clusters and beating with their foaming green waves against the lower branches of the oaks; but the swaying pines continued to display the same gray tops, indifferent-seeming to the springtime, until, one morning, they too should have snatched off their cloud of pollen, the great sulphurous cloud of their love. And Maria, as she turned down a walk, had found a broken doll and a handkerchief clinging to the furze. But today, she was a stranger to that land, and there would have been nothing there to receive her except the sand in which she once had lain flat on her belly. . . .

Justine having informed her that dinner was served, she straightened her hair and sat down in front of a plate of steaming soup. Since it was absolutely necessary that the maid and her husband should not miss the cinema, she found herself, half an hour later, alone at the livingroom window. The odorous linden had no odor as yet; but down below, the rhododendrons were already a darkening mass.

From fear of annihilation and in order to get her breath, Maria sought a stray bit of wreckage to which she might cling: "I have yielded," she reflected, "to that instinct of fear which we, nearly all of us, feel in the presence of a human face disfigured by hunger and want. As for that beast, you are still trying to persuade yourself that he is a different being from the child whom you adored; yet he is the same child, but with a mask. Just as pregnant women wear a bilious mask upon their faces, so men in love have that often hideous, always terrifying appearance of the beast that stirs inside them. Galatea flees that which terrifies her, but which is, at the same time, the thing to which she calls. . . . I had dreamed of a long pathway of caresses, in the course of which, by imperceptible degrees, we should have passed from the temperate zones to the most enervating of climes; but that little he-goat had to go and spoil it all by his haste. . . . Why did I not yield to that stupid frenzy of his! It may be in the plundering of my body that I should have found that rest which I cannot even conceive; something better than rest, perhaps. . . . Does there not, perhaps, exist between individuals an abyss which no amount of caresses ever could fill. . . . What caresses?" She remembered; her mouth formed a grimace, and she emitted

an exclamation of disgust. Images assailed her: she could see Larousselle drawing away with bleeding cheeks, as he fumed: "What do you want, anyway? You're in clover. . . ."

What was it, then, that she did want, after all? She wandered up and down the deserted room, leaned an elbow on the window, and dreamed of an indescribable silence—a silence in which she would have been able to feel her love, without that love's having to utter a single word—and yet, her well-beloved would have understood; he would have understood her desire before that desire was born. Every caress presupposes a certain amount of space between two beings; but they—they would have been so melted, one into the other, that an embrace would have been unnecessary,—that brief embrace unclasped by shame. . . . Shame? She fancied she could hear Gaby Dubois' harlot's laugh, and the words which the latter, one day, fairly had shrieked at her: "No, no, you are wrong; speak for yourself! I tell you, it's the only thing worth while, the only thing that you can depend on. . . . In my dog's life, it has been the only consolation I've had. . . ." What was the cause of her own disgust? Did it mean anything? Did it indicate a desire for any one in particular? A thousand vague ideas awoke in

Maria, only to disappear, like the shooting stars and straying fireballs in the desert blue above her head.

Can it be, then, Maria questioned, that my law is not the common law? Without husband, without children, without friends, surely no one could be more alone in the world; but what was this solitude compared with that other isolation from which the most affectionate of families never would have been able to free her—that isolation which we experience when we recognize within ourselves the stigmata of a species apart—a lost race, one might say, of whose instincts, needs and mysterious ends we are no more than the interpreters? Oh! if only she did not have to wear herself out in this quest! The sky was still pale with a remnant of day and the rising moon; but the shadows were gathering under the tranquil leaves. With her body leaning out into the night, as though drawn, as though breathed in by the melancholy of the vegetable world, Maria Cross yielded less to the desire to drink from this airy river, encumbered with branches, than to the temptation to lose herself in it, to be dissolved wholly—so that, at last, her inner desert might be mingled with the desert of space—so that this silence in her might not be any different from the silence of the spheres.

## CHAPTER X

RAYMOND COURRÉGES, having furiously relieved himself in the public highway of all the insults with which he had failed to deluge Maria Cross, now felt the need of defiling her still further; and that is why it was that, barely having entered the house, he asked to see his father. The doctor, as he previously had advised his son, had decided to remain in bed for forty-eight hours with nothing to eat or drink but water, to the great joy of his wife and mother. His attack of pseudo angina pectoris had not in itself been sufficient to bring him to do this; but he was curious; he was anxious to study upon himself the effects of such a treatment. Robinson had looked in the evening before. "I should have preferred Dulac," remarked Madame Courrèges, "but Robinson it had to be; he's a physician, at least; he knows how to stethoscope."

Robinson had slipped in and climbed the stairs as stealthily as possible, being in constant anguish at the prospect of meeting Madeleine face to face, even though they had never

been engaged. The doctor was lying there with his eyes closed and his mind blank but strangely lucid nevertheless; his body felt free under the light bed-coverings, and he now could effortlessly follow, under cover of day, the trail of his thoughts—a trail which, to his wandering mind, was now lost, now picked up again, now confused with other scents; the doctor's mind was like a dog beating the bushes while his master walked on unconcerned. He tirelessly composed articles, which all he had to do was to write, articles replying point by point to criticisms which his last paper before the Biological Society had aroused. His mother's presence was soothing to him, as was also that of his wife, and it was very comforting to be aware of them. Brought to a stand-still after an exhausting chase, he now permitted Lucie to catch up with him. He marveled at the manner in which his mother effaced herself in order to avoid any clash; the two women shared without dispute a prey that had been snatched for a time from profession, studies and a love of which they knew nothing—a prey that no longer floundered about, but, on the other hand, manifested an interest in the slightest words they dropped, whose universe, in short, had been contracted to the proportions of their own. Here he was actually wanting to know whether Julie

was really going to leave, or if they might hope that she would make it up with Madeleine's maid. Whether it was his mother's hand or his wife's upon his brow, the doctor discovered once more that feeling of security he had known when he was a sick child; he rejoiced that he was not going to have to die alone, and the thought came to him that death ought to be the simplest thing in the world in a room furnished with a familiar mahogany, and with one's mother and wife standing about, forcing a smile; the taste of that last moment would be disguised by their presence like the taste of a bitter medicine. Yes, to go wholly enveloped in this mendacious atmosphere, to know one's self the dupe. . . .

A stream of light invaded the room, and Raymond came in grumbling: "You can't see a thing here." He went over to his father, the only one in whose eyes he could defile Maria Cross this evening; the taste of what he was about to vomit forth was already in his mouth. The sick man said: "Kiss me," and rested an ardent gaze upon this son of his who, the evening before last, in the vineyard walk, had dried his face for him. Coming into the half-shadows from the light of day, the youth could not clearly make out his father's features; so he inquired, in a haughty tone:

"Do you recall the last conversation we had about Maria Cross?"

"Yes, what of it?"

Bent, at the moment, over that prostrate form as though to implant either a kiss or a dagger-thrust, Raymond now saw a pair of eyes brimming with anguish, eyes that hung upon his own lips; and he understood that his father, likewise, had suffered. "I've known it," he thought, "ever since that evening when he called me a liar. . . ." There was no jealousy on Raymond's part, for he could not bring himself to conceive of his father's ever having been a lover; no jealousy, but a strangely tearful feeling, mingled with one of irritation and derision: those thin gray cheeks under that scraggly beard! that oppressed and imploring voice:

"What of it? What is it that you know? Tell me quickly."

"I was wrong, Dad; you are the only one who really knows Maria Cross; I felt I had to tell you. And now, try to get some rest. How pale you are! Are you sure that this diet is the thing for you?"

Raymond listened, stupefied, to the sound of his own words, the opposite of those he had wanted to shout. He rested a hand upon that sad and barren brow—the same hand which, but a short while back, Maria had been hold-

ing off. The doctor found it cool, and was only afraid that it would be taken away.

"My opinion of Maria was formed a long time ago. . . ."

As Madame Courrèges entered the room, the doctor laid a finger on his lips, and Raymond tiptoed out.

The doctor's mother now came in, bringing a kerosene lamp (for, weak as he was, electric light would have been hard on his eyes), and having deposited it upon the dresser, she lowered the shade. That narrow circle of light, that light of long ago, recreated the mysterious world of rooms that were no more, where a night-lamp had struggled against the semi-darkness, growing momentarily more dense, with the furniture on all sides already half-submerged. The doctor loved Maria, but he was now detached from her: he loved her as the dead must love us. She summed up all his other love-affairs, since his youth. . . . Following up this trail, the doctor was aware that a sentimental attachment, like the one from which he barely had done suffering, had always, from year to year, held him in thrall; he could trace back the monotonous chain link by link, give the names of his passions, almost all of them quite as vain. . . . And yet, he had been young once. . . . It was not age alone that had separated him from Maria Cross; at

twenty-five, he would have been no better able to cross the desert which lay between himself and this woman. Barely out of school, at Raymond's present age, he recalled having been in love without a moment's hope. . . . It was a law of his nature never to be able to reach those whom he held most dearly; he never had been more conscious of this than in those half-successful affairs, when he had pressed to his bosom the object he so had coveted, only to find it, of a sudden, diminished, impoverished, so different from all he had expected, so out of proportion to all that he had suffered on account of it. No, he had but to look into his mirror to discover the reason for that solitude in which he was doomed to die. Other men—such a man as his father had been, such a man as Raymond undoubtedly would be—even in old age, had followed the law of their beings, obedient to their amorous vocations; but he, even in youth—he had been obedient to his solitary fate.

The ladies had gone down to dinner, and he could hear another sound out of his childhood, the sound of spoons against plates; but nearer to his ear and heart were that swishing of leaves in shadow, those crickets, that frog re-

joicing in a fall of rain. Then, the ladies came upstairs again.

"You must be feeling quite weak," they said.

"I am too weak to sit up."

But inasmuch as his dieting was in itself a remedy, they were gratified by his weakness.

"You must feel like taking——"

This weakness aided him in retrieving his childhood. The two women were conversing in a low voice, when the doctor heard a name:

"Wasn't that a Miss Malichecq?"

"Were you listening? I thought you were asleep. No, it was her sister-in-law who was a Malichecq; she was a Martin."

But the doctor was asleep when the Basques came, and did not open an eye until he had heard their door closing behind them. Then, his mother rolled up her knitting, rose with an effort, kissed him on the forehead, the eyes and neck, and said: "You're not very warm. . . ."; and he was alone with Madame Courrèges, who at once began moaning:

"Raymond's taken the last train for Bordeaux again. God only knows what time he'll be back. He was in such a

humor this evening! enough to frighten one. . . . When he's gone through with his allowance, he'll be running us into debt—if he hasn't started, already."

The doctor murmured: "Our little Raymond . . . he's nineteen now . . .," and then shuddered as he thought of those deserted Bordeaux streets at night; he remembered that sailor whose sprawling body he had stumbled over one evening, and whose face and chest bore the mingled stains of wine and blood. There were footsteps on the floor above . . . a dog was barking furiously over by the commons. Madame Courrèges listened:

"I hear some one walking. . . . It can't be Raymond, or the dog would not be making such a fuss."

Some one was coming up to the house, but cautiously, and with an obvious effort to avoid any appearance of stealth. The shutters of the casement-window were shaken, and Madame Courrèges leaned out:

"Who's there?"

"A call for the doctor; it's urgent."

"The doctor never goes out at night; you know that very well. Go over to the village, to Dr. Larue."

But the man, who was holding a lantern in his hand, in-

sisted; when the doctor, who was still drowsing, called out to his wife:

"Tell him that there's nothing doing. What's the use of living in the country, if one is to be disturbed at night."

"Impossible, sir; my husband only gives consultations. . . . But he has made arrangements with Dr. Larue. . . ."

"But, Madame, it's one of his patients, a neighbor. When he hears the name, he'll come. It's Madame Cross, Madame Maria Cross; she's had a fall on the head."

"Maria Cross? Why should he put himself out for her, any **more** than for anybody else?"

But the doctor, having caught the name, had risen and, jostling his wife a little, was leaning out into the night:

"Is that you, Maraud? I didn't recognize your voice. . . . What's happened to Madame?"

"A fall on the head, sir. . . . She's delirious; she's calling for Monsieur le docteur."

"In five minutes . . . time to dress. . . ."

He shut the window and began looking for his clothes.

"You don't intend to go?"

He did not answer; he was talking to himself: "Where are my socks?" His wife was protesting: had he not declared, only a moment ago, that he would not put himself

out for any one at night? Why this sudden change of mind? He did not stand erect, for he would have fainted from weakness.

"It's a patient; you understand that I can't refuse."

"Yes," she said sarcastically, "I understand; it took me some little time, but I understand at last."

At that moment, Madame Courrèges had no suspicion of her husband as yet; she was merely trying to hurt him. He, sure of his detachment, of his renunciation, did not suspect himself. After the passion that had rent him, nothing appeared to him less blameworthy, more avowable, than his well-meant alarm this evening. He did not stop to think that his wife was not in a position, like himself, to contrast the former with the present state of his love for Maria Cross. Two months ago, he would not have dared exhibit his anguish in such a manner as he was doing this evening. When a passion is at its hottest, our gestures instinctively tend to dissimulate it; but when we have renounced the joy that it holds, when we have accepted an eternal hunger and thirst as our portion, we are then at least entitled, so it seems to us, no longer to have to put ourselves out by going to the trouble of putting others on the wrong scent.

"No, dear Lucie, all that is farthest from my thoughts

now; all that is over. Yes, I am very fond of that poor unfortunate woman; but that does not mean. . . .”

He leaned against the bed, as he almost whispered: “I forgot I hadn’t had anything to eat,” and then asked his wife if she could not make him some chocolate on the spirit-lamp.

“If you think that I’m going to be able to find any milk at this time of night! And there’s probably not a bite of bread in the kitchen. But after you’re through attending to that prostitute, she can make you a little supper. . . . It’s surely worth it, the trouble you’re putting yourself to!”

“My poor dear, how stupid you are! If you only knew. . . .”

She had seized his hand, and her face was close to his own as she spoke:

“You said: ‘All that is over . . . all that is the farthest thing from my thoughts.’ So, there *has* been something between you two, eh? I have a right to know. I shan’t throw it up to you, but I want to know.”

Winded, the doctor had to make a second attempt to put on his shoes. He now grumbled: “I was only speaking in general terms. . . . It had nothing to do with Maria Cross. Come, come, Lucie, you surely don’t suspect me.” But she

was going back in her mind over those past few months: Ah, yes, she held the key at last! Everything was explained; everything was clear to her now.

"Paul, don't go to that woman's house. I've never asked anything of you. . . . You surely can grant me that."

He protested, as gently as he could, that it was not a matter for him to decide. He owed his services to a sick, for all he knew, a dying patient. A fall on the head, that might mean death.

"If you keep me from going, you will be responsible if she dies."

She let him go, finding no further answer to make. She stammered to herself, as he went off: "It may be a put-up affair; they may have arranged. . . ." Then, she remembered that the doctor had not had anything to eat since the night before. Seated upon a chair, she could hear the murmur of voices in the garden below:

"Yes, she fell out of the window . . . it must have been an accident; if she had wanted to kill herself, she wouldn't have picked the front mezzanine. . . . Yes, she's delirious . . . keeps complaining of her head . . . can't remember anything."

Madame Courrèges heard her husband directing the man

to go look for some ice in the village; he would be able to find some at the inn or at the butcher's; he would also have to stop at the druggist's for some bromide solution.

"I'll go through the Bois de Berge. That will be quicker than waiting to have them harness the horse. . . ."

"You won't need a lantern; with the moonlight, you can see as plain as day."

The doctor barely had gone through the little gate leading into the commons, when he heard the sound of running feet behind him and a voice gasping out his first name. He then recognized his wife, in her dressing-gown and with her hair done up in its nightly plaits; speechless from lack of breath, she held out to him a slice of stale bread and a big bar of chocolate.

\* \* \*

He went through the Bois de Berge, where the moon was spangling the glades without being able to penetrate the leaves with its shimmering whiteness; but out upon the road, the moon was queen, and there spread out as in a bed which it had scooped with its own light. The doctor's bread and chocolate had the taste of his boarding-school lunches

of old—the taste of the happiness he had known, at dawn, when he would set out for the hunt, his feet bathed in dew—he was seventeen then. Stunned by the first blow, he was barely beginning to be conscious of his path: “If Maria Cross was dying . . . for whom had she wanted to die? But had she wanted to die? She would not be able to recall anything.” Ah! how tiresome they were, those shock-victims who never recalled anything, and who insisted upon veiling in shadows the one essential moment of their destiny! But he must not ask her any questions; the first and most important thing was that her brain should be given as little work to do as possible. “You are but a physician at her bedside, remember that. No, it is not a suicide; when one wants to die, one does not select a mezzanine window. She doesn’t use drugs, that I know of. . . . It is true, her room did smell of ether, one evening . . . but it was an evening when she had a headache. . . .”

Beyond his own choking anguish, on the outer bounds of his consciousness, another storm was rumbling and would break in due time. “Poor, dear, jealous Lucie! What a pity! But it will be time to think of that later. Here we are. . . . Looks like a stage-garden by moonlight . . . as trite as a set from *Werther*. . . . I don’t hear any cries.” The front door

stood ajar, and the doctor by force of habit made his way in the direction of the now deserted livingroom, then retraced his steps and went up to the floor above. Justine opened the bedroom door for him, and he went over to the bed where Maria Cross lay moaning; she was removing with one hand a compress which covered her forehead. He did not even see that sheet-wrapped body which he so often had undressed in thought; he saw neither the undone hair nor the arms that were bare to the armpits; the one thing that interested him was the fact that she had recognized him, that her delirium was, then, but intermittent. She was saying: "What's up, Doctor? What has happened?" He made a mental note: amnesia. And now, bending over that nude bosom whose gentle breathing once had given him such a thrill, he listened to the patient's heart, and then, laying a finger lightly upon the wounded brow, endeavored to establish the limits of the injury: "Does it hurt you here? . . . Here? . . . Here?" She also had a pain in her hip, and he drew back the sheet, being careful to lay bare only the small bruised area, then replaced the coverlet. His eye upon his watch, he took her pulse. This body had been placed in his hands to cure and not to possess. His eyes knew that it was not for them to find enchantment, but to make ob-

servations. He surveyed that body ardently, with all the intelligence at his command; but his clear-seeing mind barred the way for his forbidden love.

She was groaning: "I'm in pain. . . . Oh, such pain!" And she removed her compress, calling for a fresh one, which the maid wrung out of a kettle for her. The chauffeur now came in with a pail of ice; but when the doctor wished to apply the ice to Maria's forehead, she thrust the India-rubber headpiece aside and, in an imperious voice, demanded a warm compress, exclaiming to the doctor: "Hurry a little, can't you? It takes you an hour to carry out my orders!"

The doctor was greatly interested in these symptoms, which he had observed in other shock-victims. That body there, carnal source of his dreams, of his desolate reveries, of his delectations, no longer aroused in him anything but an intense curiosity, increased by tenfold. The patient was now speaking freely and without delirium; and the doctor marveled at the fact that Maria, whose diction was ordinarily so defective, who was accustomed to search for her words without always finding them, should of a sudden have become almost eloquent, lighting without effort upon the most exact phrase, the technical term. What a mystery, he

thought, that the power of this brain should have been so increased!

"No, Doctor, no, I did not want to die. I forbid you to think that I had any such desire. I do not recall anything, but the one thing I am sure of is that I did not want to die, but to sleep. I have never longed for anything but rest. If any one has been boasting of driving me to the point of death, I forbid you to believe him; you understand? I forbid it."

"Yes, my friend. . . . But I give you my word that no one has been making any such boasts. Raise yourself up a little and swallow this; it's bromide; it will calm you."

"I have no need of being calmed; I am in pain, but I am quite calm enough. Take that lamp away. Too bad, I've spotted the sheets. I'll spill your nasty old medicine for you, if I happen to feel like it. . . ."

When the doctor asked her if she was resting a little easier, she replied that she was still in very great pain, but that it was not the pain from her wound alone; and being in a talkative mood, she once more raised her voice, which inspired in Justine the reflection: "Madame talks like a book." The doctor told the girl to go lie down, that he would keep watch until morning.

“What way out was there except sleep, I ask you? It all seems so clear to me now! I understand what I did not understand before: those beings whom we think we love . . . those love-affairs that come to so wretched an end. . . . I know the truth now. . . .” (She removed with her hand the compress which had grown cold, and her wet hair remained sticking to her forehead, as though she had been perspiring.) “Not love-affairs, but one sole love in us—and we gather up, from the chance meeting of eyes and mouths, something that may, conceivably, correspond to that love. What madness to hope to attain the object itself—When you stop to think that there is no path between ourselves and those other beings except that of touch, an embrace . . . lust, in short! We know only too well where that road leads, and why that trail was blazed: for the perpetuation of the species, as you would say, Doctor, and for that purpose only. Yes—do you understand?—we make use of the only possible path, but one that never was meant to lead to the thing we are looking for. . . .”

The doctor, at first, paid only a distracted attention to this speech, which he made no effort to comprehend, being interested exclusively in this exhibition of stammering eloquence; it was as though the physical shock had been suffi-

cient to half-arouse in this woman long-slumbering ideas.

"Doctor, there is nothing for us to do but go in for physical pleasure. Gaby said to me: 'I am telling you, my little Maria, it is the only thing in the world that has never tricked me, just remember that!' Alas! pleasure like that is not within the reach of all of us . . . I am not equal to it. . . . Yet, it alone can make us forget the object which we seek, by becoming the object itself. 'Stultify yourself' is a very easy thing to say."

The doctor reflected that it was curious she should be applying to physical pleasure Pascal's precept concerning Faith. In order to soothe her by any means possible, and enable her to get a little rest, he offered her a spoonful of bromide-solution; but thrusting it away she once more stained the sheets.

"No, no, no bromide; I can spill it on my bed if I like, and you shan't keep me from it!"

And without any attempt to bridge the gap, she went on:

"Always, between those whom I wished to possess and myself, there lay that obnoxious land, that bog, that mire. . . . They would not understand. . . . They thought it was that we might be swallowed up together that I had sent out a call to them. . . ."

Her lips were moving; and the doctor fancied he could catch names, Christian names. He leaned over her with avidity, but he did not hear the one name that would have bowled him over. For a few seconds, he forgot his patient, and saw before him only an untruthful woman.

"Like all the others," he grumbled. "Go on! Like all the others, you are looking for but one thing: pleasure. . . . But all of us, all of us—are looking only for that. . . ."

She raised her lovely arms and hid her face, as she gave a prolonged moan. The doctor murmured: "But what was I thinking of? I am mad!" He renewed the compress, poured out another spoonful of solution, and raised his patient's smarting head a little. Maria finally consented to swallow it.

"Yes," she added, after a pause, "me, too; me, too. But you know, Doctor, how it is when one sees the lightning and hears the thunder at the same instant? Well, pleasure and disgust are mingled in me like thunder and lightning—they strike together. There is no interval between pleasure and disgust."

She grew calmer and ceased speaking. The doctor sat down in a chair and went on keeping watch at her side, his mind filled with a jumble of thoughts. He believed

Maria to be sleeping, when her voice, calm and musing, suddenly rose:

"An individual whom we might attain, possess—but not in the flesh . . . by whom we would be possessed."

With an unsteady hand, she removed the damp cloth from her forehead; and then, there was the silence of declining night, the hour of deepest sleep; the stars have altered their positions, and we no longer recognize them.

Her pulse is regular; she is sleeping like a child whose breathing is so light that you arise and tiptoe over to see if she is still alive. The blood is mounting to her face and illuminating her cheeks. This is not a body in pain; her pain no longer forbids your desire. Must your tortured flesh keep watch much longer beside this drowsing flesh? Fleshly pleasure, thinks the doctor. Paradise open to the simple. . . . Who was it said that love was a pleasure of the poor? I might have been the man who, each evening, his day's work done, would stretch out alongside this woman; but it would not be the same woman. . . . She would have been a mother a number of times over. Her whole body would bear the traces of those ignoble uses to which, every day, it had been put. . . . No more desire;

filthy habits. . . . Daylight so soon! How slow that maid is in coming!

The doctor, fearing that he would not be able to walk as far as his own house, was convinced that it was hunger which made him weak—was especially afraid of his heart, whose beats he now counted. His physical suffering freed him from his amorous melancholy; but already, without his knowing it, Maria Cross' destiny had been imperceptibly detached from his own: moorings are broken, the anchor raised; the vessel begins to move, though one is not aware of its motion as yet; but within an hour, it will be no more than a speck upon the sea. The doctor often had made note of the fact that life ignores all those preparations which we make for it. Ever since his youth, the objects of his affection had all dropped from sight without warning, swept away by another passion; or to put the matter more prosaically, they had packed up, left town, and had not written. It is not death, that takes those whom we love. Death, on the contrary, preserves them and keeps them, in all their adorable youth. Death is the salt of our love; it is life dissolving love. Tomorrow, the doctor would be lying in bed a sick man, and his wife would be seated at his side. Robinson would be superintending Maria Cross'

convalescence and making arrangements to send her away to take the waters at Luchon, for the reason that his best friend was in practice there, and he must assist him in getting some patients. In the autumn, M. Larousselle, who frequently had to go to Paris on business, would decide to rent an apartment near the Bois, and would propose to Maria Cross that she come there and live, since she would rather die, she had told him, than go back to that Talence house with the torn rugs and the curtains filled with holes, and suffer once more the insults of the Bordeaux townspeople.

The maid now came in; and even if the doctor had not felt so weak that he could think of nothing but his weakness, even had he felt full of strength and life, there still would have been no inner voice urging him to continue gazing upon Maria Cross' sleeping form. He was never to return to that house; yet, he said to the maid: "I'll be back this evening. . . . Give her another spoonful of bromide, if she's restless." Holding on to the furniture, he staggered out, and left Maria Cross' for the last time.

He hoped that the cool six o'clock air would whip up his blood; but he had to pause at the bottom of the stairs, his teeth chattering. This garden which he so often had

crossed in a few seconds, when flying toward his love—he now looked at the gate at the lower end, and told himself that he did not have the strength to reach it. As he crept along in the mist, he thought of retracing his steps; he would never be able to walk as far as the church, where he might, perhaps, have found some one to pick him up. There was the gate at last; behind the grating a carriage: his own; and through the raised pane, he recognized the immobile, death-like face of Lucie Courrèges. He parted the curtain, sank down against his wife, rested his head on her shoulder, and lost consciousness.

\* \* \*

“Don’t worry. Robinson is attending to everything down at the laboratory; he is looking after your patients. . . . He is over at Talence, just now—you know where. . . . Don’t try to talk.”

The doctor, out of the depths of a bottomless fatigue, observed the anxiety of the ladies and was conscious of whisperings behind the door. He had no doubt that he was very ill, and put no faith in what they told him: “A simple case of grippe . . . but you could very well do without

that, in your present anemic condition. . . ." He asked to see Raymond, and Raymond was always out: "He came in while you were asleep, and didn't want to disturb you." The truth was, for three days, Lieutenant Basque had been vainly looking for Raymond at Bordeaux; they had, as yet, taken only a private detective into their confidence: "Whatever you do, see to it that it doesn't get out. . . ."

After six days, Raymond stalked into the diningroom one evening, while they were at table—thin, his face like smoked meat, with the mark of a fist-blow under his right eye. He ate voraciously, and even the little girls did not dare ask him a question. He inquired of his grandmother where his father was:

"He has the grippe. . . . It's nothing, but we were a little worried, on account of his heart. Robinson says he mustn't be left alone. We are sitting up with him, your mother and I."

Raymond declared that it was his turn, that night. And when Basque ventured: "You'd better go get some sleep; if you could see how you look . . .", he protested that he was not the least bit tired, that he had been sleeping very well every night.

"As you know, there is no scarcity of beds at Bordeaux."

This was thrown out, nonchalantly, in a tone that caused Basque to drop his glance. When the doctor, later, opened his eyes, he saw Raymond standing beside him, and drawing the lad down to him, he murmured: "You smell of musk. . . . I don't need anything; go on to bed." But along toward midnight, he was brought out of his drowsiness once more by Raymond's strides up and down the room. The young man had opened the window, and was leaning his body out. "It's a stifling night," he growled. Moths were coming in. Raymond took off his jacket, his vest and his collar, and came back and sat down in the chair; and the doctor, a few seconds later, could hear the sound of his son's steady breathing. When dawn came, the patient awoke before his attendant did, and gazed with astonishment at his offspring, as the latter sat there with dangling head and no sign of respiration, as though sleep had slain him. The cuff of his shirt was torn over his muscular cigar-colored arm, where a sailor's obscene tattoo-mark was visible. That was a fist-blow, that ecchymosis under the eye; but on the neck, the shoulder and the breast were other mouth-shaped bruises.

## CHAPTER XI

THE revolving door of the little bar never ceased revolving. The circle of tables had narrowed in about the couples on the floor, and under the dancers' feet, the leather rug contracted like a shagreen-maker's skin; within a space so confined, the dancers had become purely perpendicular. Upon the benches, women laughed to behold upon their bruised arms the scarlet imprint of an involuntary caress. The one named Gladys and her companion were putting on their furs:

"So, you're not coming, then?"

Larousselle assured them that they were leaving at the very moment when the fun was about to start. With his hands slouched into his pockets, his shoulders swaying, and his abdomen flaunting defiance, he went over to perch upon a high stool and give the bartender and a group of young fellows standing around a laugh, by pretending that he had discovered the secret for making an aphrodisiac cocktail. Maria, left alone at her table, took another mouth-

ful of champagne and set down her glass. She smiled off into the distance, indifferent to Raymond's presence, being wholly preoccupied with thoughts that he knew nothing of—fortified against him and separated from him by all that seventeen years are able to heap up in a human life. Like a stunned and blinded diver, Raymond rose from the bottom of his dead years and struggled to the surface. And yet, all that he really could claim as his own out of this dim past was but a narrow, all too short a road that lay between dense fields of shadows. His snout to the earth, he had followed the scent, ignoring all the others that had crossed his own. . . . But there was no time left for dreaming now; through the crowd and the tobacco fumes, Maria Cross had looked at him, then quickly had looked away. Why had he not so much as smiled at her? Raymond was frightened to find, after so many years, the youth he once had been taking form once more under this woman's gaze: a timid youth, in the snares of a cunning desire. This Courrèges, famous for his audacities, was trembling this evening because, at any moment, Maria Cross might rise and disappear; was he not going to try to make some move or other? He was a victim of that fatality which condemns us to put up with the exclusive and immutable

selection which a woman makes of certain elements in us; she would remain eternally ignorant of all the others which might be found there. There is no way of combatting the laws of this chemistry; each individual atom against whom we amorously bump releases in us that unvarying part of ourselves which is, most often, the part we would most willingly conceal. It is our pain to behold the loved being forming his own conception of us, doing away with our most prized virtues and flooding with light this weakness, that ridiculous trait, that vice. . . . This being imposes upon us a vision that is not our own, obliging us to conform, under that gaze, to another's cramped idea of us. And that such a one will never know that in the eyes of yet another, by whose affection we set not the slightest store, our virtues glow, our talents shine, our strength takes on the appearance of the supernatural, while our face is that of a god.

Having become once again, under Maria Cross' glance, a shamefaced adolescent, Courrèges no longer thought of revenging himself; his one humble desire was that this woman might become aware of his amorous career and of all the victories he had won, ever since the time when, immediately following the scene at Talence, he had been al-

most literally kidnapped by an American woman, who had kept him for six months at the Ritz (his family had believed he was getting ready for his examinations). But the very thing that was impossible, it seemed to him now, was to show himself to Maria Cross as a different being from the one in that overstuffed "luxury and want" livingroom, on the day when, with averted face, she had said: "I need to be alone, Raymond, do you understand? I must be alone."

It was the hour when the human tide began to ebb; but the regular customers of the little bar stayed behind; these were the ones who, at the time they checked their wraps, had laid aside their daily burden of care. That young woman in red was whirling around and around with joy, while the man held her by the hips; how happy they were, those two insects which had met in mid-air! Above an enormous pair of shoulders, an American displayed the close-cropped head of a little boy; acting upon the instigation of a god within, he was improvising steps—obscene ones, it may be—for his own amusement; and upon being greeted with a burst of applause, he bowed awkwardly, with the smile of a pleased child.

Victor Larousselle had sat down again, opposite Maria, and he occasionally turned to look Raymond over; his big vinous-red face (save for those swarthy pockets under the eyes) appeared to be soliciting a nod. It was in vain that Maria begged him to look in some other direction. The one thing Larousselle could not stand at Paris was the endless number of faces that he did not know. In his home town, there were no countenances which did not at once remind him of a name and family connections, and which he was not able with a blink of the eye to place, either to the right among those whom one treated with courtesy, or to the left among those looked-down-upon beings whom one knew, but whom one did not greet in public. There is nothing more common than this memory for faces, a gift which historians attribute to great men. Larousselle remembered Raymond from having seen the latter in his father's brougham in the old days, and from having, upon occasion, patted the lad's cheek. At Bordeaux, upon the Intendance walk, he would not have given any sign of recognition; but here, in addition to the fact that he was not accustomed to the humiliation of not being recognized, he had a secret desire that Maria should not be alone while he was busy making a fool of himself with those two little

Russian girls who had nothing on under their frocks. Watching Maria's gestures very closely, Raymond deduced that she was endeavoring to dissuade Larousselle from speaking to him; he was convinced that, after seventeen years, she still saw in him only a clumsy and bashful young brute. He could hear the man from Bordeaux growling out: "And suppose I want to, eh? That ought to be enough for you." A smile masked his evil face as he came over to Raymond with the assurance of those who are persuaded that their handclasp is a gracious favor. "He had not made a mistake, had he? Wasn't this the son of his good friend, Dr. Courrèges? His wife remembered very well having known Raymond when he was a lad, at the time when the doctor was treating. . . ." He authoritatively lifted the young man's glass and obliged Raymond to take a seat at Maria's side. The latter quickly withdrew her proffered hand. As for Larousselle, having sat a moment, he shamelessly scrambled to his feet:

"You'll pardon me, eh? . . . a moment. . . ."

Already, he was back at the bar with the two little Russian girls. Even though Larousselle might come back at any moment, and though nothing was more urgent than that Raymond should take advantage of this minute, the

young man remained silent. Maria turned her head away, and he caught the odor of her close-clipped locks, and saw with deep emotion that some of them were white. Some? A host of them, it might be. . . . The mouth, a trifle heavy and severe—but still, by a miracle, left untouched—was the focus of all the sensuality to be found in that body of which it was a part; while on that candid brow there was a light that was still, utterly, the light of innocence. Ah! what did it matter that the waves of time had beaten upon and slowly wasted away that throat, that breast, depriving them of their once firm lines?

“My husband,” she said, without glancing at the young man beside her, “is certainly indiscreet. . . .”

Raymond, quite as stupid as he could possibly have been at eighteen, expressed his astonishment at finding her married.

“You hadn’t heard it? That’s strange; all Bordeaux knows of it!”

She had resolved upon a glacial and hostile silence toward Raymond, but appeared to be dumbfounded that there should be one man in the world—especially, one from Bordeaux—who did not know that she was now Madame Victor Larousselle. He excused himself on the ground that

he had not been living at Bordeaux for a number of years. She could not resist violating further her vow of silence. M. Larousselle had decided the year after the war. . . . He had hesitated for a long time on account of his son. . . .

"And it was Bertrand who, as soon as he was out of the army, begged us to go through with the marriage. I was not greatly set upon it, but I gave in owing to certain important considerations. . . ."

She added that she would have been living in Bordeaux:

". . . but Bertrand is at the Polytechnique; M. Larousselle spends a fortnight here each month; and that makes a home for the boy."

She was suddenly ashamed of having spoken, of having given herself away; and distant once more, she inquired:

"And the dear doctor? Life has a way of separating us from our best friends. . . ."

What a pleasure it would be to see him again! But when Raymond took the words out of her mouth by saying: "My father happens to be in Paris at this very moment; he is stopping at the Grand Hotel; he would be delighted . . .", she turned abruptly and made out as though she had not heard. Eager to irritate her, to get rid of his

own wrath, he put up a bold front at last and broached the one burning topic:

"You are not angry with me still for my clumsiness? I was nothing but a big overgrown boy, and really so very simple! Tell me that you are not angry with me?"

"Angry with you?"

She pretended that she did not understand; and then:

"Ah! you are referring to that absurd scene . . . but I have nothing to forgive you for; I think I must have been just a little mad at that period. To think of taking seriously the urchin you were at that time! But all that holds so little interest for me now! You cannot imagine how far away it all seems."

He had irritated her, that was certain—but not in the manner he had intended. She had a horror of everything that reminded her of the old Maria Cross, but looked upon her adventure with Raymond merely as a ridiculous escapade. She was suspicious now, and asked herself if he could have known that she had, as it appeared, wanted to die. . . . No, or he would have been more haughty; he would not have had so humble an air. Raymond had foreseen every contingency, except the worst—except this indifference.

"I was living, at that time, very much withdrawn within myself. I made infinity out of trifles. It seems to me that you are speaking of another woman."

Raymond knew that anger and hate are but the projections of love, and that had he been able to awaken these in Maria Cross, his cause would not have been a hopeless one; but as it was, he was able to excite in the woman before him only annoyance, the shame of once having lent herself to so sorry a pastime, in company so shabby. She added, in a bantering tone:

"So you thought, did you, that a silly little thing like that could make any difference in my life?"

He grumbled that it had made a difference in his own—an avowal which he had never before made to himself, but which now, at last, escaped him. He had no doubt that his whole destiny had been affected by that wretched occurrence in his youth; he suffered, as he listened to Maria Cross' calm voice:

"Bertrand is right in saying that we do not begin to live our real life until after twenty-five or thirty."

The thought occurred to him, vaguely, that this was not true; by the end of the period of adolescence, everything that is to be has taken shape in us. On the threshold of

our youth, the games we are to play are laid out for us, and there can be no changing of the rules; it may be that they were so laid out since infancy: such or such an inclination, buried in our flesh before it was born, has grown with us, has combined with our youthful purity and, by the time we reach man's age, has abruptly put forth its monstrous flower.

Raymond, quite out of countenance by this time, in the presence of this unattainable woman, remembered then what it was he had so ardently longed to teach Maria; and although the certainty came to him as he talked on that his words were far from timely, he nevertheless insisted upon making it plain that "to be sure, that incident had not prevented him from becoming well acquainted with love . . . no, indeed! He undoubtedly had had more women than any lad of his age—women who counted; he was not speaking of the other kind. . . . Maria Cross, if anything, had brought him luck." She threw her head back and, with half-closed eyes, put a question to him with an air of distaste: what did he find to complain about then. . . .

" . . . Since, to you, that filthy pleasure must be the only one that means anything."

She lighted a cigarette, leaned her shorn neck against the

wall and, through the smoke-haze, followed the whirling outlines of three couples on the dance-floor. As the jazz orchestra paused for breath, the men let go their women partners and began clapping their hands, then held them out toward the negroes with a suppliant gesture—as though their very lives depended upon the keeping-up of that hubbub. The blacks mercifully cut loose again, and the insects, lifted upon the rhythmic wave, began fluttering once more in close embrace.

The hate-filled Raymond, meanwhile, was looking at this woman with the clipped hair, who sat there smoking, this Maria Cross. He sought, and finally found, the speech he required to exasperate her beyond measure:

“But all the same, here you are.”

She understood what he meant to imply: one always came back to one's first loves. He had the pleasure of seeing that face turn purple, while the eyebrows harshly drew together.

“I have always abominated places like this; you surely do not know me very well, if you don't know that! Your father himself ought to remember the martyrdom I used to suffer when M. Larousselle would drag me to the *Lion Rouge*. It would be of no use for me to inform you that I

am here out of a sense of duty—yes, out of a sense of duty. . . . But what could a man like you understand of my feelings in the matter? Bertrand himself advises me to give in, to a reasonable degree, to my husband's taste. If I want to retain any influence over him, I must not draw the rope too tightly. Bertrand is very broad, you know; it was he who begged me not to oppose his father, when M. Larousselle insisted upon my bobbing my hair. . . .”

It was enough for Maria to utter Bertrand's name, and she at once grew calm, tender and relaxed. Raymond saw again, in his mind, a deserted walk in the Parc Bordelais, at four o'clock; he saw a breathless lad pursuing him, and he could hear that tearful voice: “Give me my copy-book. . . .” What sort of man had that skinny youngster turned out to be? Raymond sought, once more, to inflict a wound:

“Why, here you are now, with a grown son. . . .”

No, she was not hurt; she smiled beatifically:

“That's right; you knew him in school. . . .”

Raymond suddenly existed in her eyes: he was one of Bertrand's former schoolmates.

“Yes, a grown son; but a son who is at once a friend and a teacher. I never could tell you what I owe to him. . . .”

"Yes, you've told me: your marriage."

"My marriage, that's true enough—but that would be nothing in itself. He has shown me . . . but no, you wouldn't understand. But I was just thinking, a moment ago, that you must have been his play-fellow. I should love to know what sort of child he was; I have often asked his father; it is unbelievable that a father should find nothing to say on the subject of what his son was like: 'a nice lad, like all the others,' he tells me. But come to think of it, it is not at all likely that you knew him any better. After all, you are so much older than he!"

Raymond growled: "Four years, that's nothing."

"I remember him," he added, "as a little brat with a face like a girl's."

She was not angry, but replied with a calm disdain that she could imagine they were not made to understand each other. As for Raymond, he understood that in Maria's eyes, her step-son was a being immeasurably above him. She was thinking of Bertrand now; she had had some champagne to drink, and she was smiling angelically. She was clapping her hands, she too, like those momentarily parted insects, in order that the music might go on adding to her enchantment. In Raymond's memory, what was left

of all the women he had possessed? To tell the truth, he would scarcely have recognized them. But in those seventeen years he had lived through, there were no days that had gone by without his awakening in himself, in order that he might at once insult and caress it, that face the profile of which was so close to him this evening. Yet, she was so far from him at this moment that he could not bear it; and that he might bring her, at any cost, a little closer, he once more spoke Bertrand's name:

"He'll be leaving school before very long?"

She replied, pleasurably, that this was his last year, that he had lost four years on account of the war; and she certainly hoped that he would come out among the first. And when Raymond observed that no doubt Bertrand would take his father's place in business, Maria protested that they were going to give him time to decide. But she was quite sure that he would make his mark, no matter where. His was a soul the worth of which Raymond simply could not comprehend.

"In school, his brilliancy is simply extraordinary. . . . But I don't know why I am telling you all this. . . ."

It was with the air of one coming down from the heavens that she asked him: "And you? What are you doing?"

"Business. . . . I manage to get along. . . ."

At that moment, his life appeared to him a wretched one. She had barely heard; she did not even despise him; he did not exist in her eyes. Half rising, Maria made signs to Larousselle, who was still perorating upon his stool. He cried: "Just one minute more!" She lowered her voice: "How red he is! He's drinking too much. . . ." The negroes were swathing their instruments like sleeping children. The piano alone seemed unable to stop. One whirling couple was left; the others, without unlocking their embrace, had dropped down. This was an hour which Raymond Courrèges had often enjoyed to the full: the hour when claws were drawn in, when eyes were full of kindness, when voices were muffled, and when hands became insidious. . . . At such a time, he would smile, as he thought of what was to come afterward, when, upon leaving a room at dawn, the man would go off whistling, while behind him, across a bed, lay a jaded, to all appearances an assassinated body. . . . Ah! surely enough, he would not thus have abandoned Maria Cross' body! A lifetime would have been too short for him to feed upon that. She is so indifferent, she does not perceive that he has brought his knee up against her own; she is not even con-

scious of the contact; he is without power over her; and yet, he had had her within the reach of his hand in those years long gone by, and she had thought that she loved him. He did not know; he had been but a child; she should have let him know what she expected of him; no caprice would then have rebuffed him, and he would have gone as slowly as she could have wished. For he knew how to slacken, at need, the flight of pleasure. . . . She might have tasted the joy. . . . Too late now. Must he wait for ages, until their destinies again should meet in the six o'clock tram? He raised his eyes and beheld in the mirrors his decayed youth, saw the signs of decrepitude peering at him. The time for being loved is no more; now is the time to love, if you are worthy of it. He laid a hand upon Maria Cross' hand:

"Do you remember the tramway?"

She shrugged her shoulders and, without turning around, had the impudence to inquire: "What tramway?" Then, in order not to leave him time to reply:

"Will you be so good as to go look for M. Larousselle and get our things from the cloak-room . . . or otherwise, we shall never get out of here."

He pretended that he had not heard. She had taken par-

ticular pains to say: "What tramway?" He would have liked to protest that nothing counted in his life except those minutes when they had sat face to face, among the poor, with whose grimy faces sleep was performing its topsy-turvy miracle: a newspaper slipped from a pair of heavy hands; a bareheaded woman raised her supplement toward the lamp, and her lips moved as in the act of prayer. Rain-drops were hollowing out puddles in the dust of that little road behind the Talence church; a laborer on a bicycle passed them, bent over his handle-bars, and he carried in the form of a sling a cloth bag, from which protruded a bottle. The dusty leaves through the gratings were like hands seeking water.

"I beg you, please be good enough to go get my husband. He's not used to having so much to drink; I should have kept him from it; he can't stand alcohol."

Raymond, who had taken his seat again, now rose, and once more was horrified by his reflection in the glass. What good did it do him that he was still young? One still could be loved, it was true, but one could no longer choose. All things were possible in the springtime of the flesh, with its ephemeral splendor. . . . Five years ago, Raymond was thinking, and he would not now be despairing over his

chances; but he knew, better than any one else, what a man's first youth could win from a woman, worn out with antipathies, preferences, reserves and regrets—what it could awake, in the way of curiosity, appetites. Now, he felt disarmed; and he gazed on his body as, on the eve of battle, he might have gazed upon a broken sword.

"If you don't make up your mind, I'll go myself. They're giving him some more to drink. . . . How am I going to get him home . . . ? Oh, what a disgrace!"

"What would your Bertrand say, if he could see you here, at my side, and his father over there . . . ?"

"He would understand everything; he always understands."

\* \* \*

It was then that there came, from the direction of the bar, the sound of a heavy body falling. Raymond dashed forward and, with the aid of the bartender, did his best to support Victor Larousselle, whose legs had been caught in the overturned stool, while a convulsive blood-covered hand clung to a broken bottle. Maria tremblingly threw a cloak over Bertrand's father, and turned up the collar to hide that violet-hued face. The bartender remarked to

Raymond, as the latter settled the score, that "you never knew when it was an attack of some sort"; and he almost carried the big fellow all the way to the taxi, so afraid was he that his customer might "croak" before he had got him safely out the door.

Maria and Raymond occupied the turn-down seats, while the drunken man reclined upon the seat opposite them; a blood-stain was deepening upon the handkerchief about the injured hand, and Maria was moaning: "This never happens to him; I should have remembered that he can't stand wine. . . . You will give me your word not to say anything about it?" Raymond was exultant; it was with a tremendous joy that he greeted this unexpected stroke of luck. What folly to have doubted his star! Although winter was drawing to a close, the night was cold, and a fall of hail was whitening the Place de la Concorde in the light of the moon. In the interior of the cab, Raymond was supporting that mass of flesh, from which came mumbled words and belches. Maria had opened a flask of smelling-salts, and her companion was entranced by the acrid aroma; the latter was warming himself at the fire of the beloved one's body at his side, and he took advantage of the transient glow from every street-lamp to devour with his eyes

that beautiful, now humiliated face. For a moment, she took the old man's heavy head, a frightful one to behold, in her hands; and at that moment, she resembled Judith.

She was anxious, above everything else, that the concierge should not know anything of what had happened; and she was only too glad to accept Raymond's assistance in dragging her husband as far as the elevator. They had no sooner sprawled him out upon a bed than she saw that his hand was now bleeding copiously and his eyeballs were revulsive. Maria was frantic with fright, she who was clumsily incapable of rendering even those little ordinary services to other women. . . . Should she call the servants on the seventh floor? But what a scandal! She decided to call her doctor; but the latter must have disconnected his 'phone for the night, for she was unable to get an answer. She burst into sobs. Raymond remembered then that his father was in Paris, thought of calling him, and made the suggestion to Maria. Without so much as thanking him, she was already looking in the telephone-book for the number of the Grand Hotel.

"Give him time to dress and call a cab and my father will be here."

Maria now took his hand. She opened a door and turned on the light:

"Should you mind waiting in here? It's Bertrand's room."

She remarked that the sick man had vomited and felt better, but that his wound was still bothering him. When she had gone, Raymond sat down and buttoned up his cloak; the radiator was none too warm. He could still hear his father's sleepy voice. How far off it had sounded! They had not seen each other for three years, since the death of Grandmother Courrèges. At that time, Raymond had found himself in urgent need of money, and it may be that he had demanded what was coming to him in a little too brutal a fashion; but one thing in particular had pricked the young fellow to the quick and had brought on an open break, and that had been his father's remonstrances concerning a certain mode of life which horrified the good man; the habits of a go-between had impressed him as being unworthy of a Courrèges, and he had ventured to demand that Raymond seek a regular occupation. . . . He would be here in a few minutes; should he embrace him, or merely offer his hand?

Such were the questions which Raymond put to him-

self; but one object drew and held him, and that was Bertrand Larousselle's bed—a little iron bed, so clean under its flowered cotton coverlet that Raymond had to burst out laughing; it was the bed of an old maid or a school-girl. The walls were bare, except one that was lined with books, and the work-table was as orderly as a good conscience. "If Maria were to come to my place", thought Raymond, "that would make a different woman out of her." She would see there a divan so low as to be indistinguishable from the rug; every feminine creature who had ventured into that half-light had there found herself perilously out of her element, with the temptation to yield to gestures which she felt would be no more binding than those she might essay upon another planet—than those over which sleep casts its mantle of innocence. . . . But in the room where Raymond was waiting this evening, there was not even a curtain to hide the frozen panes of the winter night; the one who occupied this room must have wanted to be awakened by the dawn, before the sound of the first bell. Raymond failed to discern the evidences of an innocent life; this room, which was made for prayer, inspired in him only the thought that denial in love is a convenient retardment, and one from which pleasure benefits in the end.

He read a few of the titles, and snarled: "What a simpleton!" Nothing was more foreign or more distateful to him than these chronicles of another world. How slow his father was in coming! He would have preferred not to be left alone; he felt that this room was mocking him. He opened the window and gazed out over the roofs, under the belated moon.

"Your father is here."

He shut the window and followed Maria into Victor Larousselle's room. There, he caught sight of a dark shadowy figure leaning over the bed, and recognized upon a chair his father's enormous hat and the same ivory-headed cane which had been his own steed in the days when he had played horse; but when the doctor straightened up, he did not know him. This old man, who was smiling at Raymond and drawing his son toward him—yet, he knew that it was his father, nevertheless.

"No tobacco, no alcohol and no coffee; white meat at noon, no meat at night, and you'll live to be a hundred. . . . That's all!"

The doctor's "That's all" was uttered in the drawling voice of one whose mind is somewhere else. He never took

his eyes off Maria, who, seeing him standing there like a statute, took matters into her own hands, by opening the door and saying:

"I think we all need a little sleep now."

The doctor followed her out into the entry-way.

"It's quite a coincidence, all the same," he began in his timid voice, "our meeting again like this. . . ."

While hastily slipping into his clothes a short while back, and in the taxi on the way down, he had planned that these few words of his should be interrupted by Maria, who would exclaim: "Now that I have you, Doctor, I'm never going to let you go again!" But this had not been her reply when, from the doorway, he had blurted out: "It's quite a coincidence, all the same. . . ." Here he was, repeating his studied speech for the fourth time, as though, from sheer insistence on his part, the expected response must come at last. But no, Maria was handing him his coat and was not greatly concerned with helping him find the sleeve.

"The world," she politely observed, "is a small place after all. We've met this evening, haven't we? Why shouldn't we meet again?"

She pretended not to hear the doctor's "Perhaps, we ought to aid chance . . .," and so, he raised his voice:

"Don't you think, Madame, that we might be able to aid chance a little?"

How embarrassing it would be, if the dead were to come back! They do come back, sometimes, having preserved of us a picture which we ardently would wish to see destroyed, associated as it is with memories which it is our one passion in life to forget. Every living being finds himself embarrassed by these drowned ones whom the tide washes up.

"I am no longer the lazy-bones that you once knew, Doctor; I must go lie down now, for I have to be up at seven."

She was annoyed by his protestations, bored to death by the old man's persistent eye, as he kept repeating: "Then, you do not think that we might aid chance, eh?" She replied, with a gracious but slightly short-spoken manner, that he knew her address:

"As for myself, I never get down to Bordeaux. . . . And you, perhaps. . . ."

It was so pleasant, the doctor observed, to put one's self out a little!

"If the stair-light isn't burning, the button is right there."

He obstinately declined to budge. Did she feel no bad-

effects from her fall? Raymond stepped out of the shadows to inquire: "What fall?" She shook her head, wearily, and spoke with a great effort:

"Do you know what would be nice, Doctor? We could write to each other. . . . I am no longer the frantic correspondent I once was; but for you, I might. . . ."

"To write is nothing," he replied. "Of what use is it to write, if we never see each other?"

"But that's all the more reason, just because we don't see each other!"

"No, no, do you think that those who were sure of never seeing each other again would wish to prolong the life of their friendship through the artificial means of letter-writing? Especially, when one of them perceives that he has become a bore to the other. . . . One becomes a bit of a coward as one grows older, Maria; one has had what is coming to him, and one fears an overdose of pain."

He had never said so much to her before; did she understand at last? She was distracted at the moment: Larous-selle was calling for her; it was five o'clock; and she was in a hurry to be rid of the Courrègeses:

"Well, then, I am the one who will do the writing, Doctor; and you shall have the boredom of replying."

Later, when the door had been closed and bolted, and she had come back into the room, her husband heard her laughing, and asked her what the cause of her mirth was.

"Do you know what I think? You won't make fun of me, will you? I think the doctor must have been just a wee bit in love with me, down at Bordeaux. . . . I shouldn't be at all surprised."

Victor Larousselle clammily replied that he was not jealous, and he thought of one of his old jokes: "Another one that's ripe for the cemetery." He added that the poor fellow must have had an attack of some sort, and that many of the doctor's patients, not daring to desert him openly, were in the habit of secretly going to other physicians.

"Your heart isn't bothering you any more, is it? Your hand doesn't hurt?"

"If only what happened to me this evening doesn't get out down at Bordeaux. . . . Through young Courrèges, maybe?"

"He never goes down there. Go to sleep. . . . I'm putting out the light."

She sat down in the dark and did not stir until she heard a peaceful snore. Then she went out and, on the way to

her own room, stopped before Bertrand's half-open door. She could not resist the temptation to go in, and she barely had crossed the sill when she scented an odor of tobacco, a human odor. She was furious: "I must have lost my head, to bring him in here. . . ." She opened a window to the early-morning breeze, and knelt for an instant at the foot of the bed; her lips moved, and she rested her eyes upon the pillow.

## CHAPTER XII

AS in the old days, in the brougham with the dripping panes, upon a suburban road, the doctor and Raymond were once more riding together, side by side—this time, in a taxi. They did not exchange, at first, any more words than they had on those forgotten mornings. But the silence between them was not the same silence. Raymond held the old man's hand, which was rather weak, and pressed it to his side.

"I did not know," he said, "that she was married."

"They did not let any one know; at least, that is what I think, I hope. . . . In any event, they did not let me know."

Something was said about young Bertrand's having been in favor of the proceeding; the doctor quoted Victor Larous-selle: "I am going through with a morganatic marriage," and Raymond murmured, "It's atrocious!" He stole a glance, in the half-light of morning, at that face of a condemned man, and he saw the white lips moving. That

curdled face, that stony mask, frightened him, and he grasped at the first words that came to him:

"How is the family?"

Everybody was fine. Madeleine, especially, was a wonder; she was devoting her life to her daughters, taking them out into society, hiding her own grief, and showing herself in every way worthy of the hero she had lost. (The doctor never failed to extol his son-in-law, who had been slain at Guise, never failed to make the latter honorable amends, accusing himself of not having been able to appreciate him; so many men encountered in the war a death which in no wise resembled themselves!) Catherine, Madeleine's eldest, was engaged to young Michon the third; they were waiting until he was twenty-two to announce the engagement.

"But be sure not to say anything about it."

This admonition was conveyed in his wife's own tone of voice and it was all Raymond could do to keep from replying: "Who do you think cares about that up here?" The doctor broke off, as though he had had a sharp attack of pain. The younger man was calculating: "He's sixty-nine or seventy. . . . Is it possible one can still suffer at that age, and after so many years have rolled by?" He

was sensible, then, of his own wound and was struck with fear. No, no, that would quickly pass; he could remember one of his mistresses' remarks: "In love, when I find myself suffering, I just curl up and wait; I am sure that the man for whom I want to die, tomorrow perhaps, will be nothing at all to me, and the cause of all my sufferings will not be worth a look. It is a terrible thing to be in love, and it is a shameful thing not to love any more. . . ." And yet, see how, for seventeen years, this old man had bled. For in orderly and duty-filled lives, passion concentratedly conserves itself; it is not used up; not a single whiff is evaporated; it there accumulates, becomes stagnant and infectious, breeds poison, and ends by corroding the human vessel that contains it. They were rounding the Arc de Triomphe; between the puny trees of the Champs-Élysées, the driveway flowed on as dark as Erebus.

"I think I'm through with knocking around; I've been offered a place in a factory, a chicory-plant. After a year, they'll put me in charge."

The doctor replied, in a distracted tone: "I'm very happy, my son . . ." and then, without warning:

"How did you get acquainted?"

"With whom?"

"You know very well whom I mean."

"The friend who offered me the position?"

"No, no; Maria."

"Oh, that goes back a long way; when I was in philosophy-form, we spoke a few words to each other on the tramway, I believe."

"You never told me about it. Once, as I remember, you mentioned that a friend had pointed her out to you in the street."

"That's quite possible. . . . After seventeen years, I do not remember very clearly. . . . Ah! yes, it was the very next day that she spoke to me—to ask me about you, as a matter of fact. She knew me at sight. But I think that this evening, if it had not been for her husband, who came over to me, she would have snubbed me outright."

The doctor seemed reassured, and lapsed back. "And anyway," he murmured, "what difference does that make to me? What difference does that make?" He essayed the gesture of a clean-sweep, kneaded his face with both his hands, sat up and, turning slightly toward Raymond, in an effort to escape his own thoughts by no longer thinking of anything except his son:

"Once your position is assured, get married, my boy."

And as Raymond laughingly protested, the old man came back to his own concerns:

"You do not know how good it is to live in the bosom of a family—I am telling you! One has, then, the thousand and one cares of others on his shoulders, and a thousand and one little stings bring the blood to the surface, you understand? They keep our minds off our secret wound, our deep interior wound; they become indispensable to us. . . . Look: I had intended waiting until the Congress was over, but I find that I am not up to it; I am going to take the eight o'clock train this morning. . . . The one important thing in life is to create some sort of refuge for one's self. At the end, as in the beginning, it must be a woman who bears us."

Raymond muttered: "Thanks! rather die. . . ." and he looked at the little, dried-up, worm-eaten old man at his side.

"You can't imagine what a protection I've found in you all. A wife and children surround us, hold us in, shelter us against a host of all too desirable things. You who never talked to me—and I am not reproaching you, my boy—you will never know how many times, on the verge of yielding to a delightful, possibly a criminal temptation, I have felt

your restraining hand upon my shoulder, and it was you who gently drew me back."

"How foolish," snapped Raymond, "to imagine that there is such a thing as forbidden pleasures! Ah! we are not of the same race, you and I; I should speedily have overturned my nest."

"Do you think that I did not make your mother suffer—yes, I? We are not so different, after all; how many times have I overturned my nest in my mind! . . . You have no idea. . . . Do not tell me that a few actual infidelities might, perhaps, have been better for my happiness than that mental treason of which I have been guilty for thirty years. For I would have you know, Raymond, that you would have a hard time being a worse husband than I was. . . . Yes! Yes! I've dreamed my debauches . . . was that better than to have lived them? And see how your mother takes her revenge today: through an excess of attentiveness. Nothing is more necessary to me now than her importunities; she makes herself sick . . . night and day, she broods over me—ah! my death is going to be a pleasant one! There is no such thing as service any more, you know; maids nowadays, as she tells me, aren't what they used to be. We have not been able to find any one to

take Julie's place—do you remember Julie? She's gone back to her own country. Ah! well, your mother is equal to everything; I often have to scold her; she doesn't hesitate to do the sweeping herself; she scrubs the floors. . . .”

He broke off short; and then, suddenly, was appealing:

“Don't stay single.”

Raymond did not have time to reply; the taxi was drawing up at the Grand Hotel, and he must get out and look for some change. The doctor barely had time to pack his things.



This hour of scavengers and market-gardeners was a familiar one to Raymond Courrèges; he breathed in deeply, receptively and recognizingly, the sensations which ordinarily accompanied his home-goings in the dawn: the pleasurable sensations of an animal that is thoroughly exhausted but well fed, and which now longs for nothing but its lair and sleep, where it is soon to lose itself. Lucky that his father had been willing to say good-bye in front of the Grand Hotel. How old he had grown! How he had failed! There can never be, Raymond reflected, too many

miles between ourselves and our families, and our relatives are never distant enough. He was conscious of the fact that he was not thinking of Maria, remembered that he had a great many things to do that day, took a memorandum-book from his pocket, turned to the proper page, and was astonished to find how big his day had grown—or was he to believe that the things with which he had intended to fill it had diminished? The morning? A desert. The afternoon? Those two appointments? He would not keep them. He leaned over his day like a child over a well; there was nothing to toss into it except a few pebbles; how was he to fill up this yawning hole? One thing alone would have been equal to this void: to ring Maria Cross' bell, to be announced, to be received, to sit down in the room where she had sat, to address to her any remarks whatsoever. Less than that would have been sufficient to occupy his leisure hours, and many others besides: to have had an appointment with Maria, no matter how far off; with what a dogged, ambushed patience he would have brought down the days that separated him from that day! Even if she had postponed the appointment, Raymond would have been consoled, if she had given him another; his new hope would have been equal to the in-

finite emptiness of his life. Life for him had been reduced to an absence which must be balanced by waiting. "Suppose we reason it out," he said to himself. "Let us begin with the possible, the renewing of relations with Bertrand Larousselle, coming into Bertrand's life? Not a taste in common, not a mutual acquaintance. In what sacristy would one run on to the fellow, for a sacristan he surely is?" Raymond then mentally burned all that stood between himself and Maria. Having bridged the chasm, he found himself holding that mystery-laden head in his own curved right arm; he felt resting upon his biceps that shorn neck which was like a young lad's cheek; and that face came to meet his own, came near, grew larger—quite as deceptive, alas! as on a motion-picture screen. . . . Raymond was astonished that the first passers-by he met in the street did not turn to take note of his madness. How our clothes do cover us! He sank down upon a bench opposite the Madeleine. His misfortune was to have seen her again; he should not have seen her; all his passions these seventeen years had, without his knowing it, been kindled against Maria—as the peasants of Landes light their counter-fire. . . . But he had seen her, and the fire was now blazing higher than ever, its flames mingling with those which had

been intended to combat it. His sensual manias, his secret habits, his skill in debauchery, patiently acquired and cultivated, had become the accomplices of that crackling conflagration, which was now roaring along an enormous front.

"Curl up," he told himself; "it won't last; and while waiting for it to be over, drug yourself, float along on your back." His father, it was true, was destined to suffer to the end; but then, just think what a life he had led! It would have been simple enough, if debauchery could have freed him from his passion; but everything plays into passion's hands: fasting exasperates it; satiety strengthens it; our virtues keep it awake and irritated; while it, at once, holds us terrified and fascinated. But if we yield to it, our cowardice will never be able to meet its demands. . . . Ah! what a frantic force it was! He should have asked his father how he had managed to go on living with a cancer like that. What was there in a virtuous life? What escape? What could God do?

Raymond concentrated his attention upon surprising the forward movement of the big hand upon the dial-plate of the pneumatic clock at his left. His father must have left the hotel by this time. The desire came to him to embrace

the old man once more; it was a simple filial desire, but between the two there was forming another blood-bond, a more secret one; they were related now through Maria Cross. Raymond hastily made his way down toward the Seine, although it was some time yet before the train left; he may have been succumbing to that frenzy which obliges one to run when one thinks one's clothing is on fire. In his case, it was the unbearable certainty that he would never possess Maria Cross, that he would die without ever having possessed her. This lad, who had taken, kept, cast off so many women, was experiencing that same mad rage to which certain men, pure and condemned to purity, are a prey, when they face the horrifying prospect of dying without ever having known carnal pleasure. What he had had did not count; nothing was of any value except that which he would never have.

Oh, Maria! He was amazed that one human being, without willing it, could exert so much weight in another's destiny. He had never thought of those qualities which come out of us, and which, frequently, without our knowing it and far away, go on working in other hearts. Along the sidewalk between the Tuileries and the Seine, his pain for the first time obliged his thoughts to come to rest upon

those things to which, in the past, he never had given a thought. This, no doubt, was due to the fact that, at the dawn of this particular day, he had felt himself bereft of all ambitions, all plans, all diversions; there was nothing now to turn him from his life that was spent. Having no future, he saw now that his past had begun to swarm. How many creatures to whom his very approach was fatal! He did not know, as yet, to how many lives he had given a direction, how many he had robbed of direction; he was in ignorance of the fact that, on account of him, such and such a woman had slain a bud in her bosom, a young girl had died, a friend had entered a seminary—that, in short, each one of his own dramas had been provocative of others. On the verge of that awful void—a day without Maria and all the other days without her that were to follow—he discovered simultaneously this dependence and this solitude: he was to have forced upon him the most limited communion possible with a woman whom he was, yet, assured of never being able to attain; the fact that she had seen the light was sufficient to cause Raymond to dwell in darkness—for how long? If he was bent upon emerging at any price, if he wished to escape that gravitation, what other exits were open to him than those of self-

stupefaction and of sleep . . . ? At least, until, in his heaven, that star should suddenly go out, as all love went out. But Raymond was carrying around with him a madman's passion, inherited from his father—an all-powerful passion, capable of giving birth, even until death, to other living worlds, to other Maria Crosses, whose wretched satellite he would, in turn, become. . . . The only thing left was that, before their death, father and son should have revealed to them at last One who, though they did not know it, was calling to them and drawing them to Himself from the depths of their being and its flaming flood.

He crossed the deserted Seine and glanced up at the station clock; his father must be in the train already. Raymond went down to the outgoing platform and made his way along the string of cars. He did not have long to look; behind a pane, that death's face was cast in relief; the eyelids were closed, the hands clasped over an unfolded newspaper, the head was thrown back a little, the mouth partly agape. Raymond tapped a finger on the pane, and the corpse opened its eyes, smiled, and stumbled out into the aisle to meet the one who had done the tapping. But the doctor's pleasure was wholly spoiled by a childish fear

that the train would leave before Raymond had had time to get off.

"Now that I've seen you; now that I know you wanted to see me again, better be running along, my boy; they're closing the doors."

It was of no use for the younger man to assure him that they had five minutes yet, and that, in any case, the train made a stop at the gare d'Austerlitz. The old man would not rest easy until he saw him once more on the platform; and then, having lowered the glass, he covered his son with a gaze that brimmed with love.

Raymond inquired as to whether or not the traveler needed anything; did he care for another newspaper, a book? Had he reserved his seat in the dining-car? The doctor's reply was "Yes . . . yes. . . ." He was feasting his eyes on this lad, this man, who was so different from himself, and yet so very like himself—this part of his being which would survive him a little while, and which he was never to see again.





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